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ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND
NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN POST-SOVIET
KAZAKHSTAN

ALIMA BISSENOVA

2005

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The American University in Cairo

ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET
KAZAKHSTAN

A Thesis Submitted to

The Middle East Studies Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by Alima Bissenova

(under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker)

September 2005

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Abstract

ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN: by Alima Bissenova, M.A. candidate, The American University in Cairo.

This work examines the phenomenon of Islamic revival in Kazakhstan in the context of the socio-economic and political transformation that the country has been undergoing since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The ideological vacuum left in the wake of the collapse of discredited Communist ideology, the break-down of the Soviet moral order, national revivalist movements, and increasing contacts with the Muslim world all have facilitated the processes that have been termed "Islamic renaissance" in the regional scholarship. Examining the issue from an interdisciplinary perspective, the study ponders the question of what heightened Islamic identification might entail for individual and national identity. This thesis also explores connections between the Islamic revival and nationalism, as well as distinctions in these ideologies and their appeal to the people. It also discusses the role of outside influences on the Islamic revival in Central Asia, and international Islamic movements. The work studies Kazakhstani-Egyptian and to a lesser extent Kazakhstani-Turkish cultural-educational ties, approaching the issue through the experiences of the people who are agents to this processes. Overall, by illuminating the phenomenon of Islamic revival in a socially and politically secular post-Soviet country, this thesis on its own micro-level analyzes the role of religion in the modern world.

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INTRODUCTION

A dramatic resurgence in religious identification in Central Asia following the disintegration of the Soviet Union has been termed in the regional scholarship "Islamic renaissance" or "Islamic revival" (Malashenko and Polonskaia 109). However, the study of this "renaissance" phenomenon from the social science point of view has been somewhat disproportionate. Much attention has been given to radical Islamic movements, which, although much feared by the national governments and the United States, remain marginal in terms of their social base. At the same time, few scholars have looked into the ways in which Islamic knowledge and culture are being re-established in the region and how it is being re-accepted in post-Soviet societies. What is the specificity of a post-Soviet Islamic identity and how does it interact with other social identifications? What does "Islamic renaissance" mean in people's everyday life? If we can describe this "Islamic renaissance" quantitatively in terms of the number of newly opened mosques and madrasas, as well as mosque attendance, how can we describe it as a social imaginary? These are the questions that I am engaged with in this work focused on Kazakhstan.

To explain the phenomena of the Islamic revival in Kazakhstan I refer to two theories from the anthropology of religion. The first is the well-known "stabilization of identity" theory of Hans Mol, which essentially states that in the modern turbulent world religion gives its adherents a "stable frame of reference" providing "coherence, continuity, and emotional anchorage in time and space which the actual events have put into jeopardy" (Mol 71-72). People's returning to religion in the conditions of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and post-Soviet Central Asia can be explained in the framework of this theory, if we say that people need to find some sort of an "order" or to "maximize order" in the face of the post-Soviet "chaos."

Brazilian writer Renato Ortiz has recently introduced another theoretical elaboration which also might shed light on the current rise in religious identification in the third world in particular.

According to Ortiz's reasoning, today most of the third world nation-states have ceased to be the locus for the achievement of universal rights such as liberty, equality, and citizenship, championed by the 19th century European nationalism. Therefore, these third world nation-states have lost their capacity to respond to the universalist aspirations of their citizens:

If the nation was previously the privileged space for the realization of the universalist values, now it becomes a problem. Its borders are seen as acosmopolitan restrictions. From the cultural point of view, a subtle movement results, for the nation is not longer considered to be something "for all," but rather as a "difference." That is it starts to constitute a specific "locality" in contrast to something that transcends it: the world, the globe. The notion of "difference," replaces that of "universal." (Ortiz 433)

At the same time, universal religions, which transcend the borders of the "localized" nation-states, gain advantage over nationalist ideologies particularly because they give their adherents the possibility of acting on a global scale. As Ortiz writes, "religious institutions and transnational corporations, by defining themselves as 'beyond borders,' have at their disposal the means to act on a planetary scale" (Ortiz 432-433).

Although Renato Ortiz grounds his thesis more in the cases of the "Catholic nations" of South America and the "Islamic nations" of the Middle East, his theory might as well explain the deeper motivation of some Muslims in Central Asia, who after the collapse of the Soviet state, which undoubtedly had a strongly articulated universalist appeal, found themselves confined to their new national homes and thus might look to the global Islamic movements as an opportunity to practice transnationalism. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as a global Islamic party, which despite its marginal position in the Middle East has managed to gain substantial following in Central Asia, serves as a new example of such "transnationalism" in practice. One of the most interesting aspects of Hizb-ut-Tahrir's ideology is the marked resemblance between its vocabulary and argumentation, and the rhetoric of Soviet Communism. The only difference is that instead of the "Workers of the World, Unite!" it calls on the Muslims of the world to unite (the party's ultimate political goal is to re-establish a Universal Islamic Caliphate). Its appeal in Central Asia could be

reducible to a longing for the stable, universalist characteristics of the *Khilafa* to replace the chaos that followed the breakdown of the Soviet Empire.

Although grounded in socio-cultural theories of anthropology of religion, in terms of the data and methods involved, this thesis is interdisciplinary, as it utilizes different types of research material to approach the problem.

The first chapter is the historical background chapter, where I review secondary historical literature on Russian imperial policies in Central Asia and on the Soviet nationality and religious policies as they evolved through different stages from Lenin to Gorbachev. This history is important as it has a direct bearing on the contemporary situation of Islam in Kazakhstan.

The second chapter describes the socio-economic-political context of Kazakhstan's transition from socialism in a hegemonic universalizing state to capitalism in a relatively weak nationalizing state. This chapter also makes comparative analysis of the efforts by three Central Asian states to establish distinct national identities. It suggests that one of the major causes for religious revival might be the replacement of the universalism of the state by the universalism of religion.

In the third and fourth chapters I follow academic and media debates on the role of Islam in the making of Kazakh national identity. This discourse doesn't stand separately on its own but rather takes place within the larger nationalist discourse. The third chapter also deals with the ambiguous state policy towards Islam, state administration of religion, and the development of Islamic institutions in this new environment.

The Islamic discourse that I am talking about in the third and fourth chapters is a multi-tiered one with several distinguishable tiers. The first tier is an official discourse of the official policies towards Islam, as they can be discerned from the legislative formulae and official statements.

The second tier is the Kazakh-language press -- weekly newspapers such as *Ana Tili* and *Turkestan*, which serve as a platform for Kazakh Islamo-nationalists. It should be noted that

Russophones, who constitute the majority of Kazakhstani citizens (also including linguistically Russified Kazakhs) are hardly able to read these newspapers. Nowadays, however, Kazakh-language newspapers are selectively translated into Russian and reprinted on the major online forums.

The third tier of my research material is made of scholarly journals, such as *Sayasat* and *Evrazijskoe Soobshestvo* (Eurasian Community), research monographs, and publications that deal with the issues of Islam and national identity. Although originated as a high-brow debate among scholars, with the advent of the internet this scholarly debate has spilled over to the general public through the publications and discussions on the internet forums. For instance, a well-known ideologue of Kazakh nationalism Azimbay Ghali, a former director of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Kazakhstan, whom I cite in this work often, republishes his articles at the online web site www.navi.kz after they have been published in the scholarly journal *Sayasat*.

The final and the most important tier of this discourse are the online forums such as www.navi.kz and to a lesser extent www.kub.kz and www.sayasat.kz. This internet tier increasingly comes to absorb in itself all the other smaller tiers as everything which was printed in the press is republished and discussed on the internet.

Since independence, Kazakhstan has always had a reasonably open media where the issues of national identity, state-religion relations, state-building, and others have been debated. The spread of the internet (as of today, internet penetration in Kazakhstan is estimated somewhere between 5 % and 8%) since 2000 has enhanced these debates and raised them to a qualitatively new level. First of all, it has allowed larger numbers of the readers -- not only scholars, journalists and writers, but people of other various professions -- to systematically express their viewpoints and exchange opinions. Secondly, these internet forums have managed to bring together authors and commentators of different ideological persuasions. For instance, on the web site www.navi.kz one can simultaneously read materials published by a presidential advisor, self-exiled opposition leader, trade-union leader from a coal-mining province, ultra Kazakh

nationalist from a banned nationalist party, and radical Russian nationalist from a society of Slavic solidarity. For publishing radical nationalist views, the web site has nearly escaped the responsibility under the Kazakh law which prohibits "propaganda or agitation...of social, racial, national, religious, class or tribal hatred" (article 20, line 3 of the Constitution). The editors of the web site, however, argued that they don't agitate for hatred but only provide a platform for different (even radical) viewpoints to be expressed. Understandably, when all these radically opposite views are expressed, the atmosphere at the www.navi.kz can become heated with many commentators personally offending or in other ways intimidating authors and other commentators. However, despite all the controversy and confrontation the internet forums have significantly widened the public sphere in Kazakhstan facilitating horizontal communication among the citizens who have access to internet. At the online discussion forums it doesn't really matter who you are, because anyone with access to the internet and ability to persuade the readers can challenge the established authority and have an impact on public opinion. Although different viewpoints and their supporters clash vehemently with each other (supporters of the government with the opposition, Kazakh nationalists with cosmopolitans and Russian nationalists, supporters of the liberal economic model with supporters of the paternalist-socialist development), there is no doubt that internet forums provide a precious opportunity to talk out the issues and bridge the differences. Interestingly, at the Kazakhstani internet forum the issues of national identity find more resonance and are discussed more frequent than the issues of everyday national politics. This feature of the local internet forums was also noted by other scholars who studied the cases of imagining national identity in cyberspace.¹ So, I presume that in Kazakhstan as well as in some other post-Soviet societies national and other collective identity issues now present not only a matter of scholarly but also of public inquiry.

Finally, in the fourth chapter of this work, I use a somewhat different approach and different data to assess the phenomenon of the Islamic revival in Kazakhstan. Here I look into

¹ Based on his fieldwork among Russian internet users in Kazakhstan Robert Sanders wrote an article entitled "Reconfiguring National Identity in Cyberspace: The Case of Cyber-Russians in the Near Abroad" which was presented at the Annual Studies of Nationality Convention at the Columbia University in April 2004.

the ways by which Islamic knowledge is being reestablished in the region through the experiences of the people who are agents of Islam -- students who went to the Middle East to study Islam. So far, I cannot say that students who studied in the Middle East (especially in Egypt and Saudi Arabia) have had an impact on the nature and the direction of the Islamic revival in Kazakhstan. This is first and foremost due to the small number of graduates from Al-Azhar (four) and Islamic University in Madina (eight). The Turkish influence on the nature of the Islamic discourse in Kazakhstan is much greater because thousands of students have graduated from the Turkish secular universities and Turkish (Nurcu) schools have established a significant presence in Kazakhstan.

Chapter I

ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN: IMPERIAL RUSSIAN AND SOVIET BACKGROUND

Analysis of the Islamic discourse and Islamic revival in post-Soviet Kazakhstan will not be possible without closely looking into Soviet and Russian imperial policies towards Islam, which still have an overwhelming impact on the Muslim people of Central Asia and on the contemporary situation of Islam in the region. This chapter deals with the history of the Central Asian colonial encounter. The major question that we focus on in this chapter, which then in turn will help us to answer the questions stated in the introduction, is: What were the implications of Soviet policies (as well as previous tsarist policies) on the reconstruction and transformation of cultural-religious orientation of the Muslim people (particularly Kazakhs) in Central Asia?

Russian Colonial Heritage

From the very start of the spread of Christianity to Russia and Islam to Central Eurasia, Russian-Slav and Muslim geo-cultural spaces co-existed side by side. The first, not so victorious Russian encounter of the Muslim world goes back to the period of the Mongol Golden Horde (1251-1502), which became an Islamic state under the Khan Uzbek (1312-1340) and of which Russian principalities were vassals (this period is engraved in Russian history as a "Mongol-Tatar Yoke"). This power balance between the Horde and Russia was reversed in the 16th century with Ivan the Terrible taking successor states of the Golden Horde --- Kazan (modern day Tatarstan) in 1552 and Astrakhan (Modern day Astrakhan Gubernya on Volga) in 1556. So, from here on we can start counting the beginning of the Russian rule over the various Muslim peoples of Eurasia.

Adeeb Khalid and Olivier Roy, two well-known authors on Russian and Soviet imperial policies towards Muslim subjects and citizens respectively, define geographic contiguity and pro-longed history of Russian expansion into the Muslim world of Central Asia and Caucasus (from taking Kazan in 1552 to the taking of Kokand in 1867) as major peculiarities of Russian colonialism vis-à-vis other European colonialisms (Khalid 15, Roy 25).

Another characteristic of Russian colonialism, as Olivier Roy points out in his book (2000) The New Central Asia: the Creation of Nations was Russian willingness throughout history "to incorporate its Muslims populations rather than expelling them as the Spanish did" (26).

Although the histories of several Muslim groups such as the Noghay and the Chercess² who forcefully resisted Russian invasion and were subsequently expelled from their land, as well as the Chechen, Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars, who were deported to Central Asia in 1944, don't nicely fit into Olivier Roy's thesis, for the most part, the "incorporation theory" helps us to understand the logic of Russian colonial policies and later Soviet nationality policies. Another well-known writer on Central Asian affairs Michael Rywkin³ indicates the "missionary spirit" to be one of the major features of Russian colonial expansion. "Whether in spreading their version of Orthodoxy or of Marxism, in making people cross themselves with three fingers...or instructing 'the younger brothers' to follow the path of the 'Russian elder brother,' the Russians demonstrate the same stubborn proselytizing spirit" (Rywkin 103).

Across time and space, depending on varying geo-political and historical contexts, Russians have used different methods for controlling the various Muslim peoples of Eurasia and incorporating/assimilating them. The history of the Russian colonial encounter included "conquest and forced conversion in the sixteenth century; political treaties in the eighteenth century and the granting of status to Islam; settler colonization, indirect administration and

² The Noghay in the 18th century were expelled from the Volga region to the Caucasus. About a million Cherkess were forced to leave to the Ottoman Empire after the latter's defeat in the Russo-Turkish war of (1828-1829), after the Treaty of Edirne gave Russia their land on the eastern shore of the Black Sea

³ Michael Rywkin was one of the few Western scholars, who wrote on Central Asia before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent states. He lived in Uzbekistan for about 30 years and taught in Samarkand University before immigrating to France in the 1970s.

protectorate status at the end of the nineteenth century; and then division into 'nationalities' during the Soviet period" (Roy 26).

The Russian penetration into the territory of modern day Kazakhstan started in the 18th century when several treaties were signed with the Kazakh khans through the cultural mediation of the Tatars. The Empire granted Kazakhs protectorate status and initially let them administer their own affairs, while controlling them from the town of Orenburg and the line of fortresses that today form the frontier between Russia and Kazakhstan. The position of the Khans was to be preserved; the aristocracy was given a status comparable to that of the Russian nobility; a system of education, which didn't threaten religion, was put in place for the local aristocracy; and Kazakhs were made exempt from conscription (unlike Tatars and Bashkirs who had to serve in the Russian army). However, this kind of loose control and "soft" colonization of Kazakhs, who along with Turkmens served as a protective shield for the three sedentary emirates of Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand, came to an end with the military occupation of these khanates. The annexation of the Kokand khanate in 1868 and enclosure of Kazakhstan within the Russian territory also marked the start of more aggressive settler colonization. The Kazakh khanate was abolished along with the title of khan. Administratively, Kazakhs' land was now divided between the Turkestanskaya Gubernya (where southern Kazakhstan is today), Omskaya gubernya, (now eastern and northern Kazakhstan), and Astrakhanskaya gubernya (the modern day Caspian region).

On the religious-cultural front, Russians, who in light of their permanent opposition to the Ottomans and recurrent Russo-Turkish wars had always feared the stir of Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic sentiments in the Empire, moved to oust Tatar mediation in all social affairs of Muslim Turkic people of the Empire, and to limit Tatar influence on educational-religious networks in the region. By the end of the 1860s, the Russian Orthodox missionary Il'minskii, also a well-know linguist and orientalist, devised a qualitatively new system of education for the Empire's *inorodtsy* (literally in Russian: "people of different origin"-- aliens). He thought that it was a big

mistake to communicate with all the Muslims of the Empire in Tatar, and allow Tatar to become an official-administrative language for all the Turkic-speaking people in Central Asia and Caucasus. As he rightly construed, the existence of one literary language for all Muslims might have turned into a dangerous consolidating factor. When living among Kazakhs and Bashkirs he noticed that their vernacular language and even the language of Tatar villagers differed from the Tatar literary language. So, by the end of 1860s he designed an educational-missionary plan for *inorodtsy* which would be based on vernacular languages of the Muslim *inorodtsy* and presented it to the Ministry of Education (Ozgur Tuna 275). The Ministry agreed with his rationale that developing different literary languages for various Turkic people would help to break cultural solidarities between them and prevent the potential spread of Pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. In 1870, the minister for education, D. A. Tolstoy, issued his "Instructions for the Education of Inorodtsy," in which one's mother language was recognized as the language of elementary education, with the understanding that further education (tertiary and secondary) would be conducted in Russian (Olivier Roy 55).

Il'minskii chose Kazakhs as a focus for his experiments with the vernacular-based Russian education (the students would study first their native language and then Russian through "translative method") because, he thought, they were less Islamicized than the more sedentary people of Central Asia and less apprehensive than Tatars about Russian "missionary plots." Mustafa Ozgur Tuna in his comparative analysis of jadidist⁴ versus Il'minskii's educational projects describes Il'minskii's method of education as follows:

The curriculum included Islamic religious education, but instead of a "suspicious and staunch mullah,...a Kyrgyz⁵ [Kazakh] teacher more or less enlightened in the Russian way" taught the classes and this prevented the Kazakh students from developing "fanatic and harmful feelings." The Russian language study in these schools was the most important way to bring the

⁴ Jadidism is an Islamic enlightenment movement championed in the beginning of the 20th century by Turkophone Muslim intellectuals of the Russian Empire. Although known as religious reformists, jadidists in fact concentrated most of their activities on the issues of social modernization and enlightenment. Also importantly, jadidists imagined a nation (Turan/Turkestan) and attempted to develop national consciousness in place where there was none.

⁵ In Tsarist Russia Kazakhs were called "Kyrgyz" while Kyrgyz were called "Kara-Kyrgyz."

children closer to the Russians. The method of teaching Russian was the "translative method" that Il'minskii had introduced in all his schools. Il'minskii was especially careful to keep the developing Kazakh literary language away from the influence of Tatar. Developing a Kazakh literary language, he thought would decrease the influence of Islam and consequently increase the influence of Russian culture among the Kazakhs. (270)

Although, Il'minskii's master-plan on the gradual baptism of Kazakhs wasn't realized and the Cyrillic alphabet that he designed was changed back into Arabic at the insistence of Kazakh intellectuals, Il'minskii's experience with the development of literary languages out of vernaculars based on the Cyrillic alphabet was later resurrected by the Soviets and implemented in their nationality and language policies.⁶ Il'minskii was honored in the Soviet history as a great Russian orientalist and enlightenment figure (his missionary activities were, of course, omitted from that history).

By the beginning of the 20th century Il'minskii's ideas on the development of "native" language and a native-Russian educational system had awakened ethno-nationalist sentiments among some Kazakh intellectuals who supported the idea of Kazakh vernacular as the language of education, literature and science. They thought that providing education in the vernacular language would be more effective than teaching children in *kitabî* (bookish) Tatar, which was overloaded with *arabisms* and *farsisms*. As Olivier Roy notes in his book, nationalists who were engaged in the project of making literary languages based on vernacular dialects were not Russifiers and never intended to betray the Islamic cause. They just searched for an authenticity on a cultural identity level and for a "compromise with the Russian model of modernization" on a political level (Roy 41). We also have to take into account, that Central Asians were to a certain degree discontented with the cultural monopoly of Tatars and their role as cultural brokers between the "natives" and the "Empire" in Central Asia:

The quasi-monopoly which Tatars had over pan-Islamism in all its forms, the role played by the Tatar teachers and merchants in Central Asia, the fact that the Tatars behind their pretension to be a model, were perceived as the most Russified of Muslims, and the tsarist authorities' use of the Tatar

⁶ In 1929 the Soviets changed all of the Turkic languages' (Kazakh, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tatar, Azeri) alphabets from Arabic into Latin, and then in 1939 from Latin into Cyrillic.

language in administering the Kazakhs till 1870 all engendered a certain resentment among the populations of Central Asia, particularly since the Tatar reformists made no secret of their disdain for the region's backwardness. (Olivier Roy 41)

The language became the key issue of contention between Tatar *jadidists* and Central Asian nationalist (especially Kazakh) *jadidist* groups. The Tatars insisted that, in the *jadidist* schools and publications throughout the Empire, educated representatives of all the Turkic people should use only one (Tatar) literary language and not local dialects. For instance, the founder of *usul-e-jadid* movement, Ismail Bey Gasprinskii in 1912 in his journal *Tarjuman* argued that "with all due respect to common people, literary and scientific publications should not be published in the language spoken by a Kazakh shepherd" (Gasprinski as quoted in Ozgur Tuna 278-279). The nationalists, on the other hand, argued that they should use the language which is used by their people and not some high literary language unintelligible to the masses.

As the supporter of the government-controlled and government-driven secular education for Muslim *inorodtsy*, Il'minskii was a pronounced opponent of Ismail Bey Gasprinskii's educational project, which was aimed at empowering Russian Muslims through the combination of Muslims ideology and European culture, and several times warned Russian authorities against him. In 1884, he wrote to the ministry of education:

Gasprinskii, the publisher of *Terjuman* (*Perevodchik*) in Bahchesaray, has this aim: first to spread among the Muslims of the Russian empire European enlightenment on a Muhammedan basis, coloring European education with Muhammedan ideas; second, to unite and rally the millions of wide-spread Muhammedan peoples of Russia with different tongues (example---German unification); third, to sow a Turkish germ among all the Muslims of Russia, the Ottoman language. (Il'minskii as quoted in Ozgur Tuna 274)

Understandably and expectedly, the Russian authorities chose to support Il'minskii against Gasprinskii in issues concerning the language and education of the Muslims. They tried to prevent the spread of the *jadidist* schools across the Empire, and put various administrative obstacles in place to undercut communication between Muslims from different parts of the Russian Empire. In 1906, for instance, the Ministry of education introduced the rule that teachers

in the schools for *inorodtsy* should be of the same nationality as students. This rule was clearly directed against the Tatar *jadidist* teachers. With the help of the colonial administration Il'minskii's project of developing vernacular languages spread to other places: to the heart of the Tatar world -- Kazan, where several Russian-educated Tatar intellectuals founded the journal Zaman Kalandari in vernacular Tatar and later to Azerbaijan where *Azerijiler* ("not Azeris, but those who speak Azeri") spoke of a nation (*millet*), defined by its language (Roy Olivier 40-41).

Although Il'minskii's educational system didn't succeed in converting Kazakhs, except in a few individual cases, it did spread Russian culture across the steppe and definitely played a role in developing Kazakh national consciousness. By the beginning of the 20th century, Kazakhs stood closer to being a separate "nation" (in terms of linguistic and territorial unity) than any other group in Central Asia. They had a nationalist party, *Alash Orda*, which would later negotiate for autonomy status for Kazakhstan with the Bol'sheviks. Around the same time, the print nationalism had gained momentum with several newspapers and a couple of Kazakh-language journals engaging with each other in discussion over the issues of vital importance for Kazakh community, such as the issue of land which was being gradually confiscated by the state for the settlement of Russian and Ukrainian peasants. One of these Kazakh-language journals argued that in order to adjust to the new circumstances and save their land, nomads should gradually sedentarize. Another journal was against sedentarization as a response to the land question. The confiscation of Kazakh land by the colonial administration, which had been continuing for several decades, created strong resentment among the Kazakh masses toward the Russian colonial policies and toward Russian settlers. In this already volatile situation, the 1916 revocation of Central Asians exemption from military service, which had been granted to Kazakhs by the treaties of the 18th century, proved to be the last straw. The Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads refused to be conscripted and went into mass revolt, partially directed against Russian settlers. The elite, however, did not show solidarity with the common people's plight. In his book on Muslim cultural reform, Adeeb Khalid described a strange position of Turkestani *jadidists*

who were enthusiastic about recruitment and showed "their dismay at the uprising" (Khalid 241). Russian-educated Kazakh intellectuals likewise did not support the uprising and sought to dissuade common people from revolting against the authorities, explaining that rebels could not withstand the Russian regular army and would eventually bring destruction upon themselves and their villages. But all the persuasion by the elites and intellectuals was in vain. The rebels adopted a slogan "Better to die here than go to war and die!" In a Kazakh tradition abolished by the Russian government in 1868, the rebels elected their own khans (not Chingizid noblemen), and occasionally employed the religious rhetoric of Muslims standing against the infidels. The main revolt lasted half a year, from June 1916 till the late autumn of that year, although it continued in some areas in Northern Kazakhstan continued until the 1917 February revolution. But, as Kazakh intellectuals had rightly anticipated, the arrival of reinforcements from the Russian colonial administration crushed the rebellion, while taking vengeance on a peaceful population and confiscating all the land where "Russian blood had been spilt"⁷ (Khalid 240).

The rebellion of 1916 had shown that 150 years of Russian co-optation of the Kazakh elite and Il'minskii's education project for the Kazakhs had not managed to "incorporate" the masses of nomad Kazakhs into the Russian Empire. They remained *inorodtsy* (like aliens) to the Empire and the Empire remained alien to them. They refused to go to war in 1916 because they didn't feel that they were a part of Russia. It was meaningless for them to die in Russia (in the European part of the Empire) for the Russian cause. Russification under the tsarist rule managed to incorporate only the native elites while leaving the native masses outside of its assimilation project. This situation would be changed under Soviet rule.

⁷ In his book, Adeeb Khalid described the suppression of the rebellion in the nomadic areas of Turkestan's gubernija, which also included southern parts of Kazakhstan:

Russian control could be re-established, and then tenuously by reinforcements from Russia, who along with armed settlers, repaid the atrocities with usurious interest...The total Russian losses were substantial...2,246, but in typical Russian colonial fashion, native casualties far outnumbered them. According to early Soviet figures, in Przheval'sk oblast' [modern day Kyrgyzstan], 70 percent of the Qazaq and Qyrghyz population, and 90 percent of the cattle, died. In Semirech'e as a whole [modern day Almaty, Jambul regions of Kazakhstan], 20 percent of the population, 50 percent of the horses, 40 percent of the cattle, 55 percent of the camels, and 58 percent of the sheep were lost. The atrocities continued well into the summer of 1917. (Khalid 240-241)

Soviet Nationality Politics

Lenin, in his appeal to the "To the Muslims of Russia and the East"⁸ in December 1917, promised Russian Muslims freedom to practice their religion and called on his followers to "delicately" deal with the "Eastern question." As Lenin wrote, the policies applied in Central Russia cannot just be transplanted to the Eastern people such as the "Kyrgyz, [kazakhs], Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Turkmens who are still under the influence of their mullas ... we have to be extra careful... to win their trust...to prove we are not imperialists" (Lenin as quoted in Ashirov 14). Having articulated a rather pragmatic and prudent strategy towards non-Russian people of the Russian Empire, the young Soviet government was able to win the support of the majority of the Muslim elites and intellectuals.

During the civil war that followed the revolution, most of the nationalists of the Kazakh *Alash Orda* party and other *jadidists* of Central Asia, who although being ethnically Kazakh nevertheless thought of themselves primarily as being a part of a larger Muslim Turkestan, supported the *bol'sheviki* against the White Guards and helped the former to ultimately draw the latter out of Central Asia. Most probably, Muslims nationalists throughout the Empire threw in their lot with the *bol'sheviki* not because they really believed in Communism and in the mission of the working class, but because Soviets promised non-Russian elites a more favorable contract between the "center" and "periphery" -- the one which would have been unachievable under the Tsarist regime⁹.

⁸ The appeal "To the Muslims of Russia and the East" read:

Moslems of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirghiz [Kazakh] and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of TransCaucasia, Chechens and mountain Cossacks! All you, whose mosques and shrines have been destroyed, whose faith and customs have been violated by the Tsars and oppressors of Russia! Henceforward your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are declared free and inviolable! Build your national life freely and without hindrance. It is your right. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, will be protected by the might of the revolution, by the Councils of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies! (Lenin)

⁹ At different times, in the beginning of the Soviet rule several Kazakh intellectuals and nationalist leaders have traveled to Moscow to meet with Lenin to discuss issues of autonomy and socio-economic development of their provinces. For example, In 1918, Turar Rysqulov, traveled to Moscow where he reached an agreement with the central government to organize the Republic of Turkestan with the capital in Kokand (modern day Uzbekistan).

There were two major aspects of the "center-periphery arrangement," formal and informal, between non-Russian nationalists and the Soviets: *korenizatsiya* (the use of local cadres) and socio-economic development/modernization of the periphery (Tuminez 89).

Astrid Tuminez, who studied the nationality politics in the Soviet Union, describes the policies of *korenizatsiya*, which was practiced as early as 1918 and officially approved at the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party in 1923, as follows:

The purpose of *korenizatsiya* was to woo non-Russians into the Soviet camp and to improve Soviet administrative operations among non-Russians. The policy emphasized two elements: 1) the learning and use of local languages in government, education, literature, political propaganda, and other social communication; and 2) the active recruitment and training of non-Russians to work in the government, Communist Party, and local Soviet organs. Lenin also argued that *korenizatsiya* would counter Great Russian chauvinism and would assist nationalities that had been victimized by Russian "ethnic arrogance and insensitivity" and had remained "stateless" and "backward" under tsarism. (Tuminez 89-90)

A second important component of the "center-periphery compact" in the Soviet Union was the economic modernization and development of the non-Russian republics, which has also been a major distinction of the USSR as an empire,¹⁰ as opposed to other European empires which economically exploited their periphery. The Soviets' goal was to socially and economically transform the former imperial periphery, so they aggressively pursued education, industrialization and urbanization of the outlying republics. At the same time, we cannot underestimate the enormous human and socio-cultural cost that the national groups within the USSR paid for modernization and industrialization under the Soviets.

The policy of *korenizatsiya* as articulated by Lenin ultimately survived till the era of Gorbachev, but it had undergone significant setbacks under Stalin. Stalin's shift in nationality policies and "change of the party course" was especially evident in Central Asia. In December

Republic of Turkestan, which survived till the end of 1924, included in itself the territories of what is today Southern Kazakhstan, Eastern Uzbekistan, all of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

¹⁰ According to Astrid Tuminez, "control by the center over the effective sovereignty of the periphery is the defining feature of empires." (87)

of 1924 the Republic of Turkestan was dismantled in favor of the new territorial divisions of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The *jadidist* vision of the common Turkestani homeland was effectively crashed and any sort of public expression of Pan-Turkism was prosecuted. After this, "bourgeois nationalists" coming mainly from the *jadidists* and *Alash-Ordists*, who several years before had made a pact with the Soviets, began to be removed from their positions in the government. Eventually, as part of Great Terror in 1934-1937, Soviets executed thousands of Kazakh and other Turkestani intellectuals who had been prominent in their communities in beginning of the 20th century (understandably, most of them had non-proletarian origins and under the new social categories could be justly considered "bourgeois" or the "leftovers of feudalism"). In their place, Soviets created new elite with more modest background. However, it is important to remember that all of this occurred in the larger context of the USSR. The Great Terror of the 1930s was not only a tragedy for Muslims intellectuals; union-wide more than half of all higher educated people were arrested during these times and many of them perished.

On the economic front, by 1928 had Stalin abandoned the NEP (new economic policy) of Lenin and launched the policy of forced collectivization which had such a catastrophic impact on the lives of millions of the people in the countryside throughout the Soviet Union. Collective economy among the peasants had always been the Russian communists' vision for the countryside. In the beginning of the Soviet rule Lenin planned for the collectivization of agriculture to occur in the course of one or two decades and to be voluntary on the part of peasants once they become literate, educated and learned in the scientific methods of agriculture. However, by the end of the 1920s, it became clear that peasants were not going to move "voluntarily" into collective farms. Moreover they held back their surplus produce which they were required to sell to the state, mostly because they made more profit by selling it on the black (free) market. This endangered the food supply to the cities where industrialization and the first "five-year plan" was already advancing at full pace.

Stalin decided to move to forcible collectivization of the countryside and conduct full-scale *prodrazverstka* (requisition) of peasants' grain and livestock. Hundreds of thousands of commissars and workers were dispatched for that purpose to the countryside. In the communists' view, well-to-do individual farmers would unavoidably sabotage collectivization in the pursuit of their "class interest," while property-less peasants would join collective farms enthusiastically.

By the time collectivization came to Kazakhstan in 1929, Kazakhs, by and large, were not the same pastoral nomads they had been before Russian colonization. Their pastures had been significantly reduced to make room for peasants moving from European parts of Russia.¹¹ One of the Russian imperial "tricks" to expropriate Kazakhs' land was to declare uncultivated grazing land subject to state's appropriation. Thus, already by the beginning of the 20th century sedentarization had become an imperative for Kazakhs. The question of sedentarization was widely discussed in the Kazakh press and most of the Kazakh intellectuals were convinced that in order to carve out a space for themselves as a nation in the modern world, and, even more importantly, to hold on to their ancestral lands, Kazakhs should sedentarize and start cultivating the land.

Thus by the beginning of collectivization most Kazakhs could be considered semi-nomads out of necessity. However, most of their livelihood continued to depend on the animals (horses, sheep and to a lesser extent cattle), around which their lifestyle was organized.

In 1926, just under a quarter of the Kazakh population was engaged solely in agriculture. 38.5% depended on livestock alone; 32.2% on livestock and agriculture. Less than 10% were wholly nomadic, but two-thirds of the population was 'semi-nomadic,' migrating with their herds in summer."
(Conquest, 191)

Some officials in the local government warned that the Russian standard of a good property-less peasant who joined a collective farm were unrealistic, and, in fact would be

¹¹ The resettlement of landless Russian peasants from inside Russia in Central Asia and particularly on the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan was a part of Stolypin's land reform in 1906-1917. The Peasant Bank was set up to subsidize peasants who wanted to move to Central Asia. By the time of October revolution in 1917, about one million Russian and Ukrainian peasants have already been settled in the Kazakh steppe.

extremely traumatic if applied to Kazakhs, as they depended on their livestock considerably more than the Russian peasants did. However, because the center believed that socialist ideas and economic policies could be applied across the regions, the Kazakh case was dismissed and local officials who didn't implement the policies of the center were also prosecuted for sabotage. The standards set by the center allowed a family/household (which usually consisted of an extended rather than a nuclear family) to privately own six sheep and one cow. All the horses were to be "nationalized" and to remain only on communal collective farms or state property. Left without their animals, Kazakhs were expected to collectively grow grain as good Russian peasants.

Needless to say, Kazakhs resisted collectivization vehemently. Party operatives who came to Kazakh *auls* were killed as they attempted to expropriate the livestock. Thousands of Kazakhs fled to Turkmenistan and the Ferghana Valley to join *Basmachi* rebellion. Over 200,000 permanently fled the Soviet Union mainly to China but also to Iran and Afghanistan. Even more, about 450,000, fled to neighboring republics just to survive the famine, which ill-designed collectivization almost inevitably brought upon the Kazakhs. Most of the newly organized farms could not support the livestock herded en masse, as "collective herding," often impossible to sustain in arid regions, required quite a different organization than "collective farming." As a result of collectivization, Kazakh herds reduced in number by 80 percent from the pre-collectivization levels and did not recover till the 1960s. The human and cultural cost of Stalin's collectivization on Kazakhs was enormous. Of 3,963,000 ethnic Kazakhs counted in the 1926 Soviet census, between 1.0 and 1.75 million would die. Twenty years later, in 1959, the Kazakh population in Kazakhstan was still just one million, only one third of the 1929 population. Here again, we have to bear in mind that collectivization was not only a Kazakh tragedy. However, the Kazakhs suffered proportionally more loss of life than any other nationality in the USSR (Matley 303).

In addition to the massive human toll and economic dispossession, Kazakhs emerged from collectivization culturally broken and disoriented. It can be said that when expropriators took Kazakhs' animals they took a part of their identity, something which had defined them as Kazakhs and before that as Turkic nomads for centuries.

In 1954, Khrushchev launched another well-known Soviet development project of the "Virgin Lands" to open up a vast tract of steppe land in Northern Kazakhstan for grain cultivation. "Virgin Lands" included some Ural and Altay territories in South-Western Siberia, but were mostly concentrated in Northern Kazakhstan. The "Virgin Lands" campaign had an important demographic dimension, as it brought another half a million Komsomol (young communist) recruiters from the Slavic regions. Considering that during WW II Kazakhstan served as a deportation destination for "rogue" nationalities such as Chechens, Ingushes, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, and Koreans, the share of the Kazakh population in their own titular republic continued to diminish. In the census of 1959, five years into the "Virgin Lands" project, Kazakhs constituted less than 30 percent of the republic's population, while Russians made up the clear majority.

By the end of Hrushev's rule, in terms of socio-economic development, Kazakhstan could be considered the most successful case of socialism transplanted to an "Eastern People." Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic was the most advanced republic in Central Asia, with the highest degree of industrialization and urbanization. The Kazakh people, however, by and large were not the agents of this transformation and change. It was imposed on them from outside regardless and sometimes in spite of their will, which was paralyzed by a highly centralized hegemonic state. Modernization had also come with an enormous human and cultural cost for the native population. During the forced collectivization and sedentarization of the late 1920 and 1930s, more than a third of the Kazakh population died of starvation. The demography of Kazakhstan changed dramatically with the influx of Russians and other settlers from the European part of the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, Kazakhs had become a minority in their titular republic and

gradually faced the threat of complete cultural Russification. The bitter suppressed memories of deception, abuse, famine and terror of collectivization surfaced during the time of *perestroika* when in the wake of democracy and *glasnost* nationalities of the USSR were allowed to voice their long-held grievances.

Soviet Repression of Islam and Modernization

Under Stalin, the contract between the center and periphery was reduced to blatant use of force, while Lenin's promises to the Muslims of Turkestan ensuring them the right to practice their customs and profess their beliefs were betrayed. The start of collectivization in 1928-1929 became also a "watershed" year in which the Soviets felt sufficiently powerful to launch a full assault against Islam and the "backward" culture of the region. In 1929 the law on religious organizations was passed that prohibited proselytizing and religious education¹². This provided a legal basis for much of the persecution in the following years (Keller 44). In the next decade almost all of the mosques and religious schools were closed. Islamic literature was confiscated and replaced by anti-religious literature. By 1930, all children starting from the age of eight and all illiterates up to the age of fifteen were required to attend new secular primary schools. The curriculum of the school was designed so that it disparaged religion, ridiculed clerics and other pious people.

Soviets physically liquidated almost all of the Muslim clergy and Muslim intellectuals regardless of the non-oppositional nature of the first and despite the support for the Soviet state by the latter. They eliminated the remaining clergy's ability to function in civil society and used legal means to impede the private practice of Islam. Shoshanna Keller, in her book (2001) To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941, concludes

¹² This law remained in effect till 1990.

that the Soviet rule did more damage to Islam in 75 years than the Russian empire had done in more than 400 years (7-28).

Certainly, there is no doubt that the Soviet state gravely damaged the position of Islam and Islamic culture in Central Asia. However, in order to provide a broader perspective on the issue, it might be useful to weigh this cultural damage against the progress which Central Asians made under the Soviets compared to what Central Asians had made under tsarist rule and to what other Muslim people achieved within the same time period. Particularly, if we take the case of Kazakhstan, under tsarist rule Kazakh people had been considered *inorodtsy* (alien), and not Russian citizens while effectively having been ruled by the Russian colonial administration. Under the Soviets they received equal rights with Russians as people and cultural autonomy as a nation. The fact that these principles were enshrined in the Constitution and incorporated into the Soviet ideology and propaganda difference though, naturally, the colonial mentality that was nurtured by the Empire did not disappear with the declaration of equality. Although on paper, Soviet Muslim national republics became equal partners in a federative state, in essence "the Soviet Union functioned more like an imperial hierarchy than a federation of equals" (Tuminez 98).

In terms of socio-economic development, after the horrors of collectivization were over, the Soviet policies of electrification, industrialization and urbanization eventually did lead to higher standards of living, which steadily improved through the 60s, 70s, 80s, until the beginning of *perestroika*. If the tsarist regimes concentrated on the co-optation in education, career promotion, etc. of the native elites only, the Soviet government extended the opportunities of the higher education, medical care and other services to the general population and titular nationalities greatly benefited from quota systems that gave them privileged access to higher education, which subsequently led to white collar jobs and leadership positions.

In terms of the religious persecution in the periphery, many scholars especially from the Russian academy have pointed out that Islam had much less to lose from the socialist state than

Russian Orthodoxy, which effectively lost its position as the state religion and one of the pillars of the Empire¹³ Communists "hated all of the religions equally" and this put Islam on equal grounding with Christian Orthodoxy (Ashirov 13, Malashenko 63).

Soviet Ethnicization of Religion and Secularization

Under Soviet cultural policies, language, territory, and "national tradition" became major elements of national identity. Though the Soviet regime de-legitimized religion, it simultaneously encoded religious identities in its nationality policies. To gain some space under this new identity construction, Islamic traditions and practices had to be disguised as national.

"Why do you pretend to be a Muslim?" asked a Soviet anti-religious lecturer...a young member of the Kirghiz Komsomol. The answer was: "Because I am a Kirghiz." (Dialogue quoted in Lemerrier-Quelquejay 22)

This dialogue above shows how religion was effectively ethnicized and became a part and parcel of one's national identity. The Kyrgyz youth here can be replaced by Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik or any other representative of a Muslim nationality within the Soviet Union.

Most of the authors writing on the subject of Central Asia, particularly, Shirin Akiner, Raushan Mustafina, Michael Rywkin, Adeeb Khalid and Olivier Roy agree on the general point that repression against Islam coupled with seventy years of effective atheistic propaganda and education radically de-Islamicized Central Asia. Of course, the Soviet rule could not eradicate faith in God as such, but it managed to minimize its influence on social life.

Shirin Akiner, the well-known researcher of Central Asia from the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London, for instance, characterizes the state of Islam by the end of the Soviet rule, as follows:

...by the end of 1980s Islam had become more a marker of cultural and ethnic identity than an active spiritual commitment for most Central Asians...The chief

¹³In the 19th century, the following were declared as the principles of the Empire: "Tsar, Orthodoxy and People"

manifestations of allegiance to the faith at this period were the celebration of religious ceremonies connected with rites of passage, such as (male) circumcision, marriage and burial. Also, there was widespread observance of folk traditions, such as pilgrimages to the graves of holy men and the performance of associated rituals to secure divine assistance and protection... Knowledge of Islamic doctrine, of prayers, and even of the basic Muslim profession of faith ('There is no God but God and Muhammed is His Prophet') was limited to a small number of predominantly elderly individuals." (98)

This note by Shirin Akiner is in consensus with the observations of other students of Islam in Central Asia. Michael Rywkin also underscores the degree of Sovietization of Central Asia. In his book entitled (1990) Moscow's Muslims Challenge: Soviet Central Asia, he writes, "We must accept the fact that despite regional differences, enhanced by ethnic factors, the Soviet way of life could not have failed to influence all but the most culturally isolated individuals" (106).

Kazakh researcher Raushan Mustafina, who in the 1980s did her research in Southern Kazakhstan, wrote that by the time of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, 'even in this region which is considered a stronghold of Islam in Kazakhstan the practice of religion became a prerogative of mostly retired elderly people, who, in popular understanding, "had nothing else to do or desire in this life and nothing to fear" (particularly pressure from authorities). She also noted that 95 percent of mosque attendees were people over 60 years old and the number of people who knew Quran was steadily declining (34-35).

Islamic life under the Soviets

During World War II, Soviet administration moved to legalize some limited Islamic activities around mosques and returned to the Russian imperial tradition of centralized Muslim administration through *muftiyyat*. Thus four *muftiyyats* covering four regions were created in 1943: one based in Baku for Azerbaijan, one in Dagestan for Northern Caucasus, one in Ufa for European Russia and Siberia and one in Tashkent for the whole of Central Asia. One of the reasons behind this benevolence of the Soviets toward Islam might have been the situation during the war, when they needed the help of Islamic clergy and traditional authorities (like

aksakals – “white beards”) in Muslim societies to more effectively mobilize the numerous Muslim populations.

Yakov Ro'i's (2000) Islam in the Soviet Union: From World War II to Perestroika is one of the fundamental studies that examines how Islamic institutions functioned in the Soviet Union after World War II. The research is based on the archival materials of the Council for Religious Affairs, the Soviet government organ set up in 1944 to deal with all recognized religions other than the Russian Orthodox Church. In the very beginning of his monograph, the author warns about certain defects of this documentation which consist of reports by the representatives of the Council for Religious Affairs (CARS) in Muslim regions to the central authorities. The major cause of the distortions and inaccuracy of the reports submitted by the representative (*upolnomochennyj*) of CARS seemed to be the desire of the reporters to meet the expectation of their superiors, sometimes prompting them to consciously deceive and fabricate data:

The dimensions and systematic nature of the distortions are simply astounding. One can only conclude that the medium and low-level official or representative in the field of government institutions did not perceive his task as transmitting accurate information so that higher organs could mould their policy on the basis of real data. Rather, he saw his assignment as the compositions and dispatch of reports, which conformed to a predetermined line. (Ro'i 3)

Ro'i's scrupulous analysis of the available archival materials gives us an understanding of what kind of problems the Soviets had faced in the Muslim regions with administering Islam. From the bits of information available on Kazakhstan we can also get a glimpse of what was going on in Islamic social life of Kazakhstan from the WW II through the 1970s. Ro'i writes that as compared with other Soviet Muslim republics, Kazakhstan had the smallest number of mosques. In Kazakhstan, there were at no time between 1944 and the Gorbachev period more than twenty-six registered mosques, the distance between mosques was mostly very great indeed (181).

In Kazakhstan most oblast had just one or two mosques, except Southern Kazakhstan, which in the mid-1950s had seven, and Semipalatinsk, which had three. The republican *upolnomochennyj* in Kazakhstan stated categorically that the Muslim groups which existed in every oblast were not registered because there were no mosques; those mosques that had existed were being used for other purposes and

could not be vacated, and there was no possibility to build new ones... Yet mullas existed in many areas of Kazakhstan and Kirgizia, mostly itinerant mullas who performed the basic rites, without being attached to a registered mosque or operating within a delineated parish. (Ro'i 186)

Ro'i, however, unlike many other Russian orientalists and Soviet ethnographers before him, does not jump to the conclusion that because Kazakhs didn't have many mosques, they were "less religious." He explains that there were many reasons for such a situation. Firstly, it reflected the traditions of Kazakh nomad society, which had never had a centralized clerical authority (293). Secondly, people were apprehensive about applying for registration and preferred to practice Islam in places not controlled by the state. "Registered mosques comprised only part of the picture," says Ro'i (183).

Indisputably, even in instances where believers were not blatantly coerced into refraining from registration they were apprehensive of the supervision and control inherent in registration. In several localities believers were reported simply to have refused the registering of their communities. The very fact of filing an application inevitably drew the attention of the authorities, and this in itself sometimes entailed a certain risk. In Kazakhstan, together with some groups which did not register because they did not know how to fill in the necessary documentation or to whom to give it, there were those who said specifically that applying would 'expose' them and then they would either be persecuted or taxed. (192)

In all the Muslim regions of the Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan, communists had struggled to put "itinerant" and "mosqueless mullas" under some sort of control. Notably, most of the "itinerant mullas" were not a professional clergy but simple *aksakals* who "saw the old days" and held authority within the community. Before becoming mullas some of them had worked in production, some had fought in WW II, some had even been former communists and filled the posts in the lower echelons of bureaucracy. They possessed a very limited knowledge of religious texts, most of them could read but could not translate Qu'ran because they did not comprehend it, some of them could not even read Quran and knew only a few short suras by heart. According to the archives, researched by Yakov Ro'i, in 1960 there were over 500 unregistered clergy throughout the republic of Kazakhstan and their numbers were steadily growing. He writes, that "in Taldy-Kurgan Oblast", which had not a single registered mosque,

there were about 100 people who performed religious rites." The phenomenon of "itinerant mullas" became a problem for the authorities who had a hard time trying to curtail these activities (Ro'i 332).

Not only, in the view of the CRA upolnomochennyi [representative], did their large numbers constitute a serious violation of legislation, but they caused more harm than registered clergy, because they were subject to no control...In many cases their age seems to have made them more complacent and liable to acquiesce to pressures to refrain from conducting prayer services, but this was not always the case. One elder who gathered over 100 old people at the local cemetery to hold a festival service in the late 1960s – despite, like others, being cautioned against this,-- told the authorities when they summoned him that he would soon die and so nothing mattered to him. In other oblasti, too, so-called itinerant mullas sometimes led Friday, as well as festival prayer-services. (332)

Unable to cope with the phenomenon of "itinerant mullas" and realizing that it would be impossible to terminate the unofficial conduct of rites, the authorities in Kazakhstan finally legally allowed "mosqueless mullas" to operate in rural localities, and first of all in *raion* (district) centers (Ro'i 293). Yakov Ro'i writes that the role of "itinerant mullas" and *aksakals* in preserving Islamic culture should not be underestimated. Even though they didn't possess the proper religious knowledge, which inevitably led to mistakes in the actual conduct of rituals "nonetheless, he writes, by leading prayers, they enabled those present to pray in conformity with the rudimentary requirements of the canon." (328)

Mustafina's book on Kazakh Islamic traditions is of great value for this paper as it is one of the rare anthropological studies conducted on the ground. It offers a greater degree of accuracy and authenticity as she was doing her fieldwork during the time of *perestroika*, when people could talk openly about their attitudes towards Islam and their practices, and, also importantly, when the author herself was not bound by the political and ideological constraints of the previous era. Mustafina writes that 95 percent of the mosque attendees are elderly people. Although most of the young people consider and call themselves Muslims, they don't observe Islamic rituals. *Namaz* (prayer) is performed mostly by retired people who sit at home.

Despite the general trend of Islamic knowledge declining, with fewer and fewer people knowing Quran, etc., Mustafina notes that there has been quite a lot of Muslim activism at the grass-roots with people cleaning and supporting old *masjids* and *mazars* (shrines). She writes about a local unofficial *mulla*, who participated in World War II, returned a convinced Muslim, and later devoted his life to restoring fallen *mazars*, and in this he was supported by the local population (53-55).

Most of the imams of the Southern Kazakhstan acquired a secondary Islamic education at the Mir-Arab madrasa in Bukhara -- one of the few madrasas which was allowed to function under the Soviets (Mustafina 48-52). Some of the Imams received higher Islamic education from abroad such as the imam of the Chymkent mosque Muhametzhanov, who studied in Jordan, and Imam Ratbek Nysanbaev (the first head of the independent Kazakhstani Muftuuyat) who studied in Libya. As Mustafina writes, during times of repression against Islam, the family and the extended family space became the only locale where religion could be practiced with a certain degree of safety. However, even here the grip of the elders on the younger generation began to loosen with the advent of mass education (55).

So, if we now return to our question in the beginning of this chapter: What were the implications of Soviet policies on the reconstruction and transformation of cultural-religious orientation of the Muslim people in Central Asia? Our thesis is that official repression and state atheism did not cause Islam to disappear from Central Asia, but it did significantly shrink its place in society and transformed the understanding of it in the minds of Central Asians. As Shirin Akiner wrote, "Islam...had become more a marker of cultural and ethnic identity than an active spiritual commitment." (98) On the eve of the independence, people identified with Islam as the "religion of their forefathers" but were ignorant of its doctrine and principles, first and foremost because the atheistic socialization by the Soviet state through schools, the army, press and television was total and failed to affect only "the most culturally isolated individuals," such as elderly retired people.

Chapter II

"POST-SOVIET CHAOS" AND SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Fall of the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Chaos

The dissolution of the Soviet Union into new independent states in 1991 brought an end not just to an Empire but, perhaps, more importantly, to an alternative social formation and the moral order which accompanied it. At the peak of the Cold War in the 1960s-1970s, many scholars spoke of Communism as a pseudo-religion or a religion-substitute (Friedrich 323). Some went so far as to call Communism "a new, dynamic, this-worldly salvational religion" (Lowry as quoted in Friedrich 323). I think the definitions given by these scholars are close to the truth. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian, undemocratic state, but it was a state with a strong ideology and a state for the people, which legitimized its totalitarianism in the eyes of the people. Many hearts throughout the world, and certainly in the Soviet Union itself, were receptive to the communist moral system with its ideals of social justice, equality, and brotherhood. The Codex of Builders of Communism (general guidelines of Communist morality which are often compared with the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament) among others emphasized an individual's duty to the society, "collectivism and mutual help" (All for One and One for All), sharing, strong family values and "international friendship." As "a religion of secular salvation" the communist ideological system was centered around the belief in "a better future" (literally in Russian "bright future") where there would be no classes, no exploitation, no misery, and where every man would fulfill his human potential (From Everybody According to His Abilities, to Everybody --According to His Work). Throughout the Soviet rule, for millions of Soviet people, Communist ideology had offered a total world view and rendered their human existence meaningful. Many truly believed that they were building "a better future," if not for themselves,

at least for their descendants. Proponents of Communism today rightly point out that without this belief and mass enthusiasm, the modernization of the backward Russian Empire over such a short period of time would not have been possible, nor the Soviet victory in WW II.

However, it is also true that by the end of the 1980s the Soviet Union was suffering from major problems such as over-centralization (e.g. the real status of the national republics was falling far behind that as declared in the Constitution), a stagnant economy, and widespread corruption. The ideological authority of the party had been also undermined by this time and cynicism had become prevalent, especially among the youth. The designers of *perestrojka* intended to address all of these issues; however nobody, if we leave out the possibility of some grand anti-Soviet conspiracy, expected that opening up of the system would lead to its total collapse.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the overt and covert causes for the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, there seems to be a general agreement among scholars that the dissolution was first and foremost the result of fierce competition between the two political groups at the center (Yeltsin versus Gorbachev), and a lack of a will among new Russian liberal elites (essentially, Yeltsin's entourage) to maintain the Empire, rather than the result of centrifugal nationalist movements in the national republics, perhaps, with the exception of the Baltic states (Tuminez 126). Eventually, Yeltsin, the leader of the new Russia, overthrew Gorbachev but at the cost of the losing the Empire. The fate of the Soviet Union and the new Union treaty, proposed by Gorbachev, was decided in Belovezhskaja Pusha in December 1991 by the leaders of Russia (Yeltsin), Ukraine, and Belarus, who as "sovereign states" decided to dissolve the Soviet Union and form the Commonwealth of Independent States. Central Asian republics were not signatories of this accord, but the administration of the national republics (which was, essentially, a communist administration comprised of former party leaders) quickly embraced this historical opportunity and joined the Belovezh accord. So, by the end of 1991, all of the Central Asian states (former Soviet national republics) had become independent. This was

quite an unexpected development, because although nationalist concerns and sentiments had been expressed across the spectrum, most of them had been articulated in terms of cultural nationalism and real autonomy within the federative State. By and large, Central Asians elites and Central Asian people neither aspired to nor fought for full independence.

Needless to say, initially the leaders of the new states were unprepared and unequipped to carry out all the tasks demanded from them by the new state status. Building a new state from scratch has never been an easy task. Thus, this period of state-building in the early and middle of the 1990s was characterized throughout Central Asia by a decline in state control and state capacity, and economic and social chaos. Joma Nazpari's book Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan ably captures this state of chaos on a wide social level in the 1990s:

Most people have an acute and exaggerated sense of chaos, talk about it often and express enormous feeling of fear and insecurity. The feeling of a total void which permeates all aspects of life is commonplace. Not only the present is disconnected from the past, but the progression of time has been cancelled altogether...life and events have become extremely unpredictable, reducing the people's sense of agency. Chaos to a great extent is the lack of ability among the dispossessed to navigate these newly emerged stormy conditions of a predatory capitalism. (Nazpari 4)

In much of the scholarship on the post-Soviet space, the period of the 1990s has been termed the "period of transition." Joma Nazpari characterizes it as one of chaos and local people call it "bardak" (the Russian word for chaos). Whatever the term, there is no doubt that for the majority of the population in Central Asia, Russia and the Caucasus this proved to be a transition to a worse condition rather than to a better. The disintegration of the Soviet Union certainly profited the West and national elites in the newly independent states and in Russia, but also left millions of people socially unprotected and dispossessed in the face of "wild capitalism." Privatization, manipulation of credits, and bribery led to the accumulation of wealth in a few hands. Thus, the new rich and the new governing elites, which were to a large extent comprised of former *partocrats* (high echelons of the former Communist party), now emerged as a class lacking moral credibility in the eyes of the people. In Russia, in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet countries the newly dispossessed often portray the new rich as thieves and mafia. Lay

people sensibly reason that it was impossible for the new rich (i.e. new Russian and Kazakh millionaires) to have accumulated such a wealth over such a short period of time by legal and moral means.

The collapse of the Soviet State and Iron Curtain was also accompanied by the opening up and integration of new independent states into the world market, which had both positive and negative effects. On the negative side, the integration of Kazakhstan into the world economy led to its de-industrialization, re-orientating primarily towards the export of raw materials (Caspian oil, ferro-metals, and steel). According to some experts, Kazakhstan's transition to a market economy essentially created dual economies:

Economic reforms also created two distinct economies. One is export-oriented, and includes privatized oil companies and metal plants, and the banks that finance them. Flush with cash, they are busy issuing ADR's and corporate Eurobonds. In the other economy wages are paid in vegetable oil, vehicle tires and loaves of bread, if at all. The inhabitants of this economy live in Kazakhstan's 'dead cities' [small industrial cities built by the Soviets but de-industrialized after the collapse of the Soviet Union] ... and barter - whatever commodity they are paid to heat their homes. (Clover and Corzine 1)

Needless to say, the winners and the losers of "transition" have different attitudes towards the collapse of the Soviet Union, independence, and globalization. The nostalgia of the dispossessed, regardless of their ethnic origin, for the "old good Soviet times" is essentially an expression of their discontent with the inequalities of the new order and their response to the social trauma that it has brought. Living in Kazakhstan in the middle of the 1990s and observing different strata of Kazakhstani urban society, Nazpari notes that the dismantling of the welfare state as a part of transition from socialism to capitalism, with all the temptations of the latter, has led to a break-down of moral order with the "individual ceasing to have any social commitment beyond his or her network of relatives and friends" (Nazpari 87). I would say that even in terms of "the network of relatives and friends," capitalism with its new mode of individual consumption replacing the shared consumption of a traditional Kazakh extended family/clan or a Soviet collective farm, had a hand in destroying social "friends and relatives" networks as well. Unlike socialism, which stressed "collectivism" and "sharing," the new order emphasizes

personal success, prompting people to invest only in themselves and their immediate families. Needless to say, the capitalist economy creates the new needs and new opportunities for such investment.

On a political level, in comparison with the hegemony of Soviet state, wherein the ruling elite had a strong ideological justification for the state order, the new Kazakh elite was left to dominate society in an ideological vacuum and had to develop a new state ideology based on Kazakh nationalism ad hoc. By the end of the 1990s, the new State had managed to restore law and order across the country and, because of oil revenues, had the resources to improve economic and social indicators and avoid the extreme impoverishment of socially unprotected groups¹⁴ (i.e., retirees, agricultural labor, low echelons of state bureaucracy), as had happened in neighboring Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In terms of democratization, which was one of the overt goals of changing the Soviet system, Kazakhstan has developed into a "soft authoritarian regime" hovering somewhere between liberalism and authoritarianism -- liberal in comparison to the "hard authoritarian" regimes of neighboring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan but still lagging behind international standards. As Olivier Roy has recently noted,

Kazakh society is more complex and less monolithic than that in other countries of Transoxania. Its ethnic diversity, the size of the country, the scale of Russification, the existence of a private sector and a high degree of urbanization make it far harder to achieve political and policing control. (Roy 135)

Today, Kazakhstan is a Kazakh nation-state in the sense that it was created "on indigenous Kazakh land," as the Constitution states. Demographically, by the mid-1990s Kazakhs had won back their majority status¹⁵, while the proportion of the Russian population has steadily declined, not least because of emigration. Russians now constitute less than 30 percent of the population.

¹⁴ These groups still remain underprivileged but their overall situation is considerably better compared to the rest of the region.

¹⁵ By the end of the 1950s with the influx of a Slavic population from the European parts of the Empire Kazakhs had become a minority in their titular republic and remained such until the mid 1980s.

However, the country remains ethnically diverse with a pronounced Russian presence, which makes it difficult to build a state based solely on the Kazakh national identity, especially since it remains unclear what constitutes a Kazakh identity in the first place. Since independence, the government has pursued a policy of Kazakhization within state apparatus and the cultural sphere. However, if the first task — the nationalization of the state and ousting of the Russian technocrat elite by the emerging Kazakh national elite — was relatively easy to achieve, the decolonization (or de-Russification) of the cultural sphere proved to be problematic. One major symbol of independence, the Kazakh language, for instance, has never been able to become a *de facto* state language, and continues to lag behind the Russian language in the scope of its public use, although it was recognized as the state language in 1989.

In Search for Identity

The challenges that Kazakhstan and other new Central Asian states are facing in their effort to “carve out a nation” from the former national-administrative divisions of the Soviet Union are familiar to the students and writers of nationalism. In this respect, the conditions of the new Central Asian states are not so different from the rest of the world where:

...the peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two powerful, thoroughly independent, yet distinct and often actually opposed motives—the desire to be recognized as responsible agents whose wishes, acts, hopes and opinions ‘matter,’ and the desire to build an efficient, dynamic modern state. The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity, and a demand that that identity to be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self as ‘being somebody in the world.’ The other aim is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more efficient political order, greater social justice, and beyond that of ‘playing a part in the larger arena of world politics,’ of ‘exercising influence among the nations.’ (Geertz 250)

Although here we concentrate primarily on the efforts of new Central Asian states to establish distinct national identities, which would be recognized both from within the new nation and by the outside world, we cannot underestimate the importance of the socio-economic

("practical") expectations of the people from their new found independence. As an Uzbek academician from an impoverished Uzbek University, whom I cite in this paper, formulated the problem: "Aqsaq Temir (Tamerlane) might have been a great man... yes, but he is not going to make a living for us."

Evidently, for the majority of the new Central Asian states' nationals, the prospects for "progress," "rising standards of living," and "greater social justice" remain glum, just as they previously proved to be for the masses in the rest of the Third World. Today, it is clear that most of the post-Soviet countries have moved backwards rather than forward since the beginning of their "transition" and have been relegated to the category of a "third-world nation." Even though Kazakhstan is a relatively well-to-do country in the post-Soviet space, it still displays some of the structural characteristics of a third world nation – uneven sectoral economic growth oriented towards the export of raw materials, depressed agriculture, a mounting gap between the rich and poor, and a deepening technological dependency on the West. After a decade of independence, Kazakhstani society is one of social and economic contrasts making people nostalgic for the Soviet equity in free-for-all health care, education, housing, and other benefits of the socialist system.

On the ideological front the new nations of Central Asia, which received their independence peacefully and unexpectedly as the result of the political upheaval in the center, wanted to show that their emergence on the world scene is not a random turn of events, but a historically logical outcome of their national development. Thus each of these states attempted to challenge the notion that it had been "invented" or "constructed" by the Soviets, which in the wake of the constructivism theory of nationalism was the dominant view in the West. As Olivier Roy states in the introduction to his book the New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations, Soviet decrees determined not only "the frontiers of the new nations, but also their names, their reinvented pasts, the definition of the ethnic groups that they were reckoned to embody, and even their language" (vii).

Although the Soviets undoubtedly played a great role in the formation of the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmen into new modern nations, these nations are not completely artificial, as Roy and others argue; they emerged in the place of primordial *ethnies*, some of which can be traced many centuries back. Iranian versus Turanian, nomadic versus sedentary, other ethnic, linguistic, tribal and state-territorial divisions existed before the creation of Turkestan in 1918, before the advent of Russians, and even before the Mongol invasion as documented in the Mahmud Kashghari's Diwan al-Lughat-at-Turk (11th century), wherein he distinguished several Turkic dialects that existed at the time. The Soviets did not invent these divisions; they simply built on and institutionalized them. Of course, the irony of history is that, today, through the Soviet institutionalization, and division into "union" -- the highest ranking administrative division of the Soviet Union -- or "autonomous" republics and regions, some of these primordial divisions/identities made their way into the modern world, as in the case of "union" republics, while others disappeared, or are still struggling for recognition. (e.g., Karakalpak, Uighur, Chechen, Abkhaz).

With independence, all the new independent states, former Union republics, embarked on projects of revising and generally rewriting their history. Although, as was mentioned earlier, the Soviet Union did not follow the pattern of economic imperialism, it did pursue the most aggressive cultural imperialism. This imperial feature of the USSR found its expression in the domination of the Russian language, Russian culture and the Russian vision of history over all others. Historiographies of all "union republics" were subordinated to the interests of the Russian nation's meta-narrative, which made impossible the commemoration of national heroes who fought against Russians or symbols that were seen as anti-Russian or anti-communist. Thus for the newly emerged independent states it was a matter of their national regeneration to bring their long-suppressed history into being.

In this paper, I give an overview of three new emerged identity projects in three states of Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

Uzbekistan

In 1924 Uzbekistan was fashioned out of the heart of the dismantled republic of Turkestan and took along huge chunks of Tajik, Kazakh and Karakalpak populations. Most of the ancient and historically important Central Asian cities -- Bukhara, Samarkand, Ferghana, Kokand, Andijan, Khorezm, Khiva -- were also granted to Uzbekistan. With independence Uzbekistan's new historiography developed along the paradigm of the "history of land," a paradigm initially invented by Soviet historiographers for all the "union republics," that emphasized the connection of the current Uzbek state with all the ancient cities that are today within its territory, and with all the previous states and civilizations that have existed within its geographical boundaries. Despite the fact Uzbekistan's history was now the "richest," as most of the material history of Central Asia is concentrated in the cities of Uzbekistan, many historians argue that of all the new Central Asian national identities "Uzbek" is the most "constructed" and artificial. There is much historical evidence pointing to the fact that most of the people who are called "Uzbeks" today were not "Uzbeks" prior to delimitation of 1924 and creation of the Uzbek SSR¹⁶.

As Azim Malikov from the Samarkand State University writes:

Prior to the Russian conquest there existed three multi-ethnic states in Central Asia (the Emirate of Bukhara, the Khanate of Kokand and the Khanate of Khiva). Although all these states were ruled by Uzbek khans and their capitals were located on Uzbek territory, no feeling of a common Uzbek unity had developed among the population of the Khanates. On the contrary, internal divisions, continuous wars as well as internal conflicts have strengthened the dissociation of the Uzbeks and prevented their further ethnic development and national consolidation. (Malikov 3)

According to the British anthropologist Czaplicka, who studied ethnography of Central Asia in the beginning of the 20th century, Uzbeks then were still in the process of sedentarization:

¹⁶ Initially "Uzbek" was the name of the Chingizid Khan of the Golden Horde who made Islam the state religion. Later it became the name of the dynasty and then the name of the tribes affiliated with the dynasty. Today, it is the name of the people who at some point of history were ruled by the dynasty.

Since the Uzbeks [sic] are in process of exchanging their nomad life for a sedentary one, the customary law ('adat) is being replaced by the written law (shariat). Father-right is very strong, but the women are freer than among the Tajiks or Sarts. Though they now live in clay and wood houses (*sakla*), their old felt tents (*yurt*) are still to be seen, especially in summer. There is much ethnological evidence that the Uzbeks belong to the same ethnic group as that people who are called by the Russians Kaizak-Kyrgyz. (1918, 37)

Writing about the complexities of identification in historic Turkestan, Adeeb Khalid says that after the last wave of Turkic migration into Transoxania in the 16th century, the newcomers were called "Uzbeks" while the older Turkic population of the region was called "Turks" and/or "Sarts." Moreover, the ethnic sense of "Uzbek," "Sart," and "Tajik" did not coincide with language use. As he writes, "it was quite possible for groups to identify themselves as Uzbek [sic] speaking only Persian, as was the case with many Uzbeks in Bukhara" (Khalid 188-189).

Despite the continuing existence of regional divisions into the Khorezmian, the Bukharian-Samarkandian, the Ferghanian, and the Surkhandarian, most of the Uzbeks today identify with Uzbekistan as their nation-state. Azim Malikov writes that the Uzbek identification is now dominant even in Samarkand, which has always been known for its strong regionalism and Tajik/Farsi influence. The above evidence suggests that the term "Uzbek" has undergone a considerable change: from identifying Uzbek tribes that kept their nomadic distinction as late as the beginning of the 20th century to identifying the people who today speak Uzbek, as a mother tongue. Though in the beginning of the 20th century, Uzbeks, distinct from "Sarts" or/and sedentary "Turks" were known for their nomadic traditions, today, the tribal links are quite weak. For example, endogamy, the nomadic tradition of not intermarrying within seven generations, is no longer observed (Malikov 10). Thus, it can be concluded that the consolidation of the nation under the identity of "Uzbek," which, of course, meant different things at the beginning and end of the 20th century, had been completed under the Soviets.

As noted above, the Republic of Uzbekistan, at its creation incorporated large portions of the Tajik population in Bukhara, Samarkand and the Ferghana Valley. When the delimitation

into the "union republics" took place many inhabitants of the region, in fear of being forcibly relocated to ensure that a given nationality would be entirely contained within its "own" republic, chose to declare an identification that didn't necessarily reflect their ethnic consciousness, but was rather an estimate of which answer would enable them to remain in their home (Atkin 49). At the same time, being an Uzbek or a Tajik didn't make much difference in the bilingual milieu of the Turkic-Persian sedentary civilization where people, languages, tradition and symbols were to a great extent intermixed. Even today, although speaking different languages (the Uzbek language, being Turkic in its grammatical structure, borrows a great deal from the Farsi lexicon, as well as having a strong Farsi phonetic influence), Uzbeks and Tajiks' lifestyles and traditions are closer to each other than to that of the Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, or Turkmen. The Uzbek and Tajik affinity is especially evident in northern Afghanistan when they often form one confederation vis-à-vis other ethnic groups.

Historically, according to Adeeb Khalid, the destinies of the Turkic and Iranian people of Central Asia were so intertwined that there was no paradox involved in the fact that Firdousi composed his masterpiece of the Iranian literature *Shahname* under the aegis of the Turkish ruler Mahmud Ghaznawi. But today, unfortunately, divergent Uzbek and Tajik historiographies, which try to divide an indivisible past, present a potential source of conflict in already volatile situation in Central Asia.

Although the Uzbek state claims to be the heir of past civilizations that existed on the Uzbek territory, the Uzbekistan historiography is not consistent with its **"history of land"** paradigm, as it conveniently omits the periods of the Samanids and earlier pre-Islamic Iran, instead choosing to locate the genesis of the modern Uzbek state with Tamerlane, the principal hero of the Uzbek master narrative. It is worth noting that the alleviation of Timur to the role of the founding father of the Uzbek nation first started in the Soviet historiography, which favored Timur, a non-Chingizid, over the later Uzbek dynasty, which descended from Chingiz Khan, a constantly reviled figure in the Soviet historiography.

Tajikistan

For a variety of reasons, one of which might have been the dominance of the Turkic-speaking elite in the Turkestan Republic's government, the designers of the Soviet "national delimitation" in Central Asia discriminated against the Tajiks, having deprived the newly formed republic of Tajikistan of the two most important centers of Tajik urban culture, Bukhara and Samarkand, which were awarded to Uzbekistan. Tajikistan began its existence in 1924, as an autonomous republic within the larger Uzbekistan SSR, fashioned out of the easternmost province of Bukhara. In 1929, it was enlarged by the addition of territory further north, a portion of the agriculturally important Ferghana Valley, and was promoted to a "union republic."

In Central Asia, the Soviet historiography has always been more favorable to Iranian culture and history than Turkic culture and history¹⁷. Thus, in the Soviet times, Tajiks were considered the full heirs to two millennia of pre-Islamic Iranian civilization, as well as to Farsi literary tradition. As Muriel Atkin writes, many Tajik villagers who went to the Tajik-Soviet school know some poetry of Firdousi, Rudaki and Omar Khayam. (59)

Atkin notes that the Soviets sought to capitalize on emphasizing the links of the Tajiks with the wider Persian-speaking world, particularly with Afghanistan. Soviet-sponsored publications in Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan used official interpretations of Tajikistan's history and its transformation under Communist rule to impress kindred peoples outside of the Soviet Union. The Soviets used the cultural similarities among people living north and south of the Soviet-Afghan border in an attempt to bolster the foundering communist regime in

¹⁷ In the construction of national histories for the Soviet Republics, state policy was to promote cultural achievements over military ones. In the context of Central Asia, this meant a stronger emphasis on the Iranian part of the Central Asian culture, with the names of Iranian poets and philosophers taking a prominent place from the school curricula while the Turkic part of the culture (mainly military achievements) was at best ignored. In addition to the Russian refusal to give a prominent place in history to the Turkic tribes that dominated the south of Russia before the Mongol invasion or to the Golden Horde and its successor states, nomads also held an inglorious place in the Marxist scheme of development because of their inferior means of production. (Manz 16)

Afghanistan. "This has included such measures as bringing young people from Afghanistan to study in Tajikistan, sending Tajik academics to Afghanistan... and arranging cooperative projects" (Atkin 58).

The current Tajik historiography, which views Tajik history as the history of a living ethnos with fluctuating borders, shaped by the Tajik communist party leader and later director of the Moscow-based Institute of Oriental Studies Babadjan Ghafurov (1908-1977). According to Ghafurov, the geography of Tajik history by no means corresponded with the geographical borders of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. Modern Uzbeks, according to Ghafurov, were Turkicized Iranians, indebted profoundly to their Iranian cultural and genetic heritage. Racially, they were different from the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs showing far less Mongol features in their physiology (Atkin 52). Following in Babadjan Ghafurov's footsteps, Tajikistan historiography today continues to emphasize Tajik links with the Islamic Iranian Sunni tradition and starts the genesis of the Tajik nation-state with the Samanid dynasty (874-999), the 1,100-year anniversary of which was celebrated in 1999. The map of the Samanid state with its capital in Bukhara (modern Uzbekistan) is displayed in many public places in the country. Later in the history of the region, according to the Tajik narrative, the Samanid cultural realm was replaced by the rule of primitive Turkic nomadic tribesmen under the Ghaznavids and Karakhanids dynasties.

The Tajik historiography, with its **history of ethnos with fluctuating borders narrative**, breeds a sense of victimization when one realizes that the nation, which at some points in history controlled the whole of Central Asia and made a great contribution to the Central Asian civilization, is now reduced to the small mountainous Tajik state, with none of the major historical cities from which Persian civilization spread. This sense of victimization of Tajikistan by its Turkic neighbors, especially militarily strong Uzbekistan, is felt on the political level, as Tajikistan tries to escape the Turkic encirclement by strengthening relations with Russia and Iran.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhs didn't receive fair treatment in the Soviet historiography for two reasons: firstly, because they were pastoral nomads with inferior means of production and therefore, according to Marx's thesis that economic production relations define superstructure, without much social organization, let alone a state, and, secondly, because Kazakh tribes were members in the confederation of the Golden Horde, which ruled Russia for three centuries in a period known in the Soviet and Russian history as the 'Mongol-Tatar Yoke.'

In the early 1980s, some representatives of the nationalist elite attempted to defy this Russian historiographical attitude towards Turkic nomads. For instance, in the book called "Az - I-Ya," Olzhas Suleimenov (today the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Italy) effectively challenged the established Soviet historiographical view of the inferiority of the Turkic nomadic tribes and their negative impact on the Russian nation's formation by making a linguistic analysis of the 13th century Russian classical poem "Slovo o Polku Igoreve." In the book, Suleymenov listed all the words of Turkic origin that he found in the Russian poem. The words stood as a solid evidence of the strong cultural ties between the Turkic nomads inhabiting vast steppes of Eurasia and the Russian feudal states of the time.

In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, as in other post-Soviet states, rewriting the history and official textbooks has been a major part of the new identity construction. During Soviet times, the history of Kazakhstan has been a marginal subject taught once a month in the last two years of one's secondary education. In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, teaching national history became a higher priority with the subject being included in the list of required state examinations. At the same time the narrative of the Kazakh history also changed substantially (Nauruzbayeva 5).

In the Soviet historiography, the origin of the Kazakhs as a nation was connected to the downfall of the Mongol Empire (15th century), a major event in Russian history, after which the lands of Russia and Central Asia were 'freed' from Mongols thus opening a space for new

nations to form. The post-independence historiography sets a new time-line for evolution of the Kazakh people, one that begins much earlier than Soviet historical accounts suggested. For instance, the author of the 8th grade textbook Babayev asserts that Kazakh nationality was formed in 11th-12th centuries, but the tribes that constituted the Kazakh nation lived on the territory of Kazakhstan as early as 7th-4th centuries BC (Nauruzbayeva 7).

Thus, in the narrative of nation, the Kazakh historiography adopts **history of land and history of tribes** paradigm, which acknowledges that some tribes such as the Kypchak, the Dulat, and many others, were incorporated into the Kazakh nation already having a history of their own, which maybe more ancient and better known than the history of the Kazakhs. The perception of continuity and belonging to the territory is thus established through these well-known Turkic tribes. At the same time, the historical figures of these tribes that lived and worked outside of the territory of Kazakhstan, for instance Sultan Beybars or Al-Farabi, are also incorporated in the historical narrative as Kazak national heroes. In the beginning of the 1990s, Kazakhfilm produced a patriotic movie about the career of Sultan Beybars in Mamluk Egypt. Although, the plot was based on historical events that led to the rise of Beybars and other Mamluks, the movie especially emphasized the nostalgia that Mamluks supposedly felt for Desht-i-Kypchak, and their introduction into the Mamluk court of some steppe traditions such as drinking brewed horse milk.

In a more grandiose move aimed at making the Kazakhs known to the world in 2001 the state allocated the huge, by Kazakhstani standards, amount of \$ 40 million to Miramax to produce a blockbuster motion picture entitled "Nomad." Two of the best Russian movie producers Rustam Ibragimbekov and Segey Bobrov, who had co-produced "East-West," and many other well known Russian movies, were invited to work on it. Several well-known Hollywood actors¹⁸ were invited to play nomadic Kazakhs, and designer Michael O'Connor, who had designed the costumes for the "Harry Potter" film series, was invited to make 17th

¹⁸ Jason Scott Lee (Bruce Lee in "Dragon: the Bruce Lee Story," and Alladin in "Arabian Nights"), Mark Dacascos ("Crying Freeman," "Brotherhood of the Wolves")

century Kazakh costumes. The movie is to be released in October 2005, but has already been harshly criticized by Kazakhstani intellectuals and the artistic community. While some have questioned the rationale for spending \$ 40 million dollars on one blockbuster instead of investing this money for tens as much Kazakh-made movies, others deplored movie's representation of Kazakh history, as one well-know Kazakh writer said, "the Khan that all the Kazakhs revere has been made into a Hollywood lover character."

Apart from the "Nomad" movie, another big expenditure (more than \$ 15 million dollars) was announced for the - "Cultural Heritage"- "Madenii Mura"- program, a part of which went to finance archeological research on the territory of Kazakhstan. The program also sponsored researchers working with Chinese, Arabic, Iranian and other foreign archives who were instructed to look for any mentions and descriptions of Kazakhs or tribes that made up the confederation of Kazakhs, because one of the problems of writing the history of Kazakhs was an absence of historical documents to work with apart from Russian historical archives.

If the Russian historiography didn't attribute any statehood tradition to the Kazakhs, dismissing their nomadic state as poorly organized, in the new Kazakh historiography the emergence of the Kazakh Khanate was interpreted as the final stage or the triumph of the Kazakh national formation. Kazakh Khanate was now seen as a qualitatively new step in nomadic statehood, as, in contrast to Mongol *uluses*, it was, supposedly, based on ethnic principles. Of course, one can argue against this interpretation and simply point to the fact that this state was created by yet another lineage of Chingizids through their agreement with the new confederation of tribes, out of the traditionally susceptible to fragmentation Mongol *ulus*.

The nomadic state was essentially a confederation of the tribes that came together under a central leadership. Once the confederation was created, its continuation was dependent on the constant maintenance and renewal of the "relations of alliance, clientelship and subjugation on which it had been founded as well as on the creation of new ones" (Bastug 97). The fragility of the nomadic state and its frequent fragmentation is often explained by the power that tribal

leaders exerted over the leaders who had to constantly renew their alliance with the confederation. As Adeeb Khalid writes, "the authority of the khan for all its aura of Chinggisid [sic] descent, remained tenuous, since a number of potential Chinggisid rulers existed at any given time" (34).

Most of the Kazakh historians admit this downside to the nomadic state system, while at the same time, in the wake of the modern nation's political democratization and liberalization imperative, they emphasize the positive side of such fragmentation and decentralization. In the nationalist historiography this phenomenon is called "steppe democracy," wherein the khan was elected by the tribal leaders (*aksakaldar alkasy*), his authority depending on their willingness or unwillingness to accept his leadership. If in the Soviet times, the nomadic past of the Kazakh/Kyrgyz was regarded as the stage of underdevelopment and cultural inferiority to Russians or Central Asian sedentary populations, today, the state ideology takes pride in these nomadic traditions, which are interpreted as traditions of democracy, mobility and openness to other cultures.

Kazakhstan's ideologists' extensive use of nomadic symbols and myths in representing the identity of the new nation might be an expression of "suppressed" or even "lost culture," but it doesn't really offer a stable identity anchor for Kazakhs in the modern world, because, clearly, nomadism, however great it may have been is the thing of the past and a nation needs to look to the future.

Conclusion

Since the new states of Central Asia acquired their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the national elite have attempted to write a new history and develop distinct national identities, which would facilitate the process of national consolidation and state-building, as well as improve outside recognition. To justify the right of Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kazakhs to be titular nation in their respective independent states, the national elites tried to link newly acquired statehoods with the primordial imperial statehood traditions of the Tamerlane Empire, Samanid Dynasty and Golden Horde, while the fact that all these empires were multi-national was conveniently omitted in their narratives.

As the identity politics of the new nation states developed vis-à-vis the widely spread understanding of these nations as 'invented' by Soviets, the common tendency was to stretch modern national identifications as far back into history as possible. I think, this approach is flawed, as it does not help to explain the transformation of the primordial identities into national ones. The incorporation of the most recent past of their history, the Soviet era, which so far all of the national historiographies in question have failed to include, and an assessment of the contribution of Soviet nationality policies to the development of Tajik, Uzbek and Kazakh national identities might help to shed light on this transformation and provide the missing link.

Despite the revision of the Soviet historiography by the national elite, the new historiographies recycle Soviet narratives of national ethnogenesis and evolution in explaining the descent of their respective new nations on the historically. Thus, on a deeper level, the historiography of new nation states and identity politics remains shaped by the Soviet vision, or as Adeeb Khalid puts it more theoretically:

To look for 'responses' to colonialism in a domain located entirely outside of it is futile, since the very formulation of the response is inextricably intertwined in patterns of colonial knowledge. Although this obviously applies to modernist revisions of identity, even visions of the authenticity of native tradition are articulated through means of cultural production often introduced by colonizer. (13-14)

Chapter III

ISLAMIC REVIVAL

The post-Soviet "chaos" and search for identity that we discussed earlier in this thesis is a backdrop against which the phenomenon of Islamic revival is currently unfolding.

The "Islamic revival" in and of itself encompasses a wide range of activities including, but not limited to, the building of mosques¹⁹, the translation and publishing of Islamic literature, making *hajj* to Mecca or visiting local shrines, and acquiring an Islamic education²⁰. When we talk about "Islamic revival" we also refer to a surge in Islamic identification among people and rising levels of knowledge and understanding of Islam.

On the question of why is there an Islamic revival we can say that, on a certain level, the Islamic revival is a part of the general revival of nationalist ideology, whereby Islam emerges as a major focus in the quest for Kazakh identity. On another level, however, in light of Hans Mol's thesis that religion plays a stabilizing role in individual and group identity, we can presume that people's identification with Islam is an expression of their need to have some fixed system of coordinates (orientation) in the face of post-Soviet chaos and their new uprooted-ness.

Although there is significant diversity among and within the religions, most religions provide their adherents with a world view that assures their place in a meaningful and orderly universe, thereby partially satisfying the individual's need for psychological stability...Religious traditions often provide ready answers when pluralism and other forms of complexity threaten the established order, and thus the identities of individuals and groups. (Seul 559)

In the framework of Renato Ortiz' theory discussed in the introduction, we can also presume that some people in new Central Asian states might look to religion as an opportunity to

¹⁹ According to Yakov Ro'i, in the period between the WWII and *Perestrojka* there were no more than 26 mosques in Kazakhstan, in 2004 the Board on Relations with Religious Organization Under the Government reported that it had registered 1700 mosques.

²⁰ In 2001, there were six universities which had departments that provided higher Islamic education: Islamic University in Almaty, International Kazakh-Arab University in Chymkent, Kazakh-Turkish Yassawi University in Turkestan, Oriental Studies Institute in Shymkent, Kazakh-Kuwait University, Nur-Mubarak University in Almaty (Al-Azhari cadre), and the Ruhaniyyat Institute

practice transnationalism and an antidote to narrow national identities imposed by their nation-states.

As Renato Ortiz formulates it:

The crisis of national identities makes possible...the forging of new world identities...National identity now becomes one "difference" among others. Religion's capacity to bring people together on a greater scale and to create social ties gives it increased power. As a language, an ideology, an a worldview that, albeit dispersed, extend to a great territorial area, religion subordinates interests and coordinates collective action. (Ortiz 434)

Islamic revival has also been an expression of greater religious mobility brought about by openness and globalization. Students who wanted to study Islam could now go to the Middle East and South Asia. Missionaries and Islamic activists from Turkey, Arab countries and Pakistan could come to Kazakhstan and establish their networks and businesses. This movement of people and ideas has also led to an internationalization of Islam in Kazakhstan, which also contributed to the development of new perception of Islam as a universal religion and not just a "national tradition."

The internationalization of Islam brought along pluralization of Islam, which sometimes created friction in the Islamic community of Kazakhstan. Some students who went abroad came back as members of different Islamic movements such as Salafi, Tabligh, Nurcu, or Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Of all the foreign Islamic movements, Turkish Nurcu managed to best establish themselves in Kazakhstan. Today, Kazakhstan has the largest Nurcu *cemaat* outside of Turkey, which runs twenty eight very successful high schools, Suleyman Demirel University, "Zaman-Kazakhstan" newspaper and several affiliated businesses. Bayram Balci, who studied Nurcu networks in the former Soviet Unions, writes that "the Kazakh government has favored this cooperation as it has helped it to speed up the "kazakhization" of the country and to reduce the extensive Russian influence" (Bayram Balci 157).

The scope and the impact of Nurcu penetration into the Kazakh society has been discussed at length at the Kazakhstan internet forums www.navi.kz and www.sayasat.kz. Many Russian commentators expressed their fear of further re-Islamicization and Turkification of Kazakhs

through Turkish-run schools. Many Kazakh ultra-nationalists also had a negative view of the Turkish schools saying that they don't need another "big brother" to replace former Russian brother. The fact remains however, that Turkish schools are very successful in Kazakhstan, as they synthesized all the good qualities of Soviet education and have been able to offer a high-quality alternative separate-sex education which more and more people (mostly Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uighurs, i.e. Muslim nationalities) choose for their children. The position of Turkish schools in Kazakhstan and the favorable atmosphere in which they operate stand in contrast to the attitude towards Turkish schools in neighboring Russia and Uzbekistan. In Russia, Nurcu networks are under great pressure from Russian authorities while the mainstream media openly calls on the government to close them down²¹. In Uzbekistan, after several years of operation Nurcu were expelled, accused of cooperation with terrorists who planned the bomb attacks on president Karimov in 1999.

Increased knowledge of Islamic doctrine and Islamic rituals brought about the process termed by Dr. Rieker as "sunnification" (a standardization of Islamic rituals and practices) of the Muslim community in Kazakhstan. This process is inevitable as the wider public now accesses religious knowledge directly rather than through the mediation of *aksakals* and *mullas* who were the major sources of religious knowledge during the Soviet times. Newly educated imams and religious experts have gradually replaced the "half-literate" *mullas* of the Soviet times. If by the end of the Soviet period, religion was the prerogative of elderly people (see Chapter I), today one can just enter any mosque in the urban area to see for himself that it is the youth who make up the majority of mosque attendees.

²¹ In September 2004 *Moskovskii Komsomolets* listed the "Religious Union Nurjular" among terrorist groups in Turkey, and *Sedmitsa* accused Nurcular of forming military bands that were assisting separatists groups in Russia. (Richmond 13)

State-Religion and State-Islam Relations: Recent Developments

According to the 2003 Central Asia report of the International Crisis Group, Kazakhstan has retained the most liberal policy toward religion of any Central Asian states, in the light of general retreat of Central Asian states towards authoritarianism since the end of 1990s.

Post-Soviet Kazakhstan declares itself a secular state (article 1 of the Constitution) and guarantees its citizens freedom of conscience, provided that this freedom does not hinder the fulfillment of duties to the state (article 22 of the Constitution). The law on religion adopted in 1992 states that religion is separated from the state and forbids interference by the state in religious affairs, or vice-versa. There is also a ban prohibiting the creation of political parties on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Article 4 of the Law on Religion states that citizens and non-citizens alike have the right to profess any religion or profess none, as well as change their religious convictions.

As we discussed above, in the early years of independence the rapid revival of interest in Islam and other religions was matched by a rapid decline in state control over all aspects of social life and economy. Thus, the decade of the 1990s was also marked by "chaos" within the religious sphere, with much euphoria about legalization of Islam and other religions but with very little political consideration of religion by the state, which resulted in a lack of consistent policy towards religion. This situation changed at the end of the 1990s when the growth of so-called "sects," primarily imported by Western missionaries, and the threat of "Islamic extremism" caused the state to reconsider its laissez-faire attitude toward religion.

Discontent with the foreign missionaries was initially expressed in the Kazakh-language press, which has been a herald of Kazakh nationalism throughout modern history. Kazakh nationalist writers and intellectuals were especially concerned about the trend of Kazakh youth converting to other religions. It seems that the alarm set off by the Kazakh-language press was heard at the Ministry of the Information and Public Accord, the governmental body staffed with

many influential Kazakh intellectuals who were assigned the task of developing sound "national ideology." As a part of this ideological mission, the Ministry of Information was also responsible for regulating religious activities. So, in 1999, the Ministry presented the parliament a set of amendments to the 1992 Law on Religion that, according to the Ministry formulated, were intended to limit the expansion of "non-traditional" denominations and prevent the spread of "religious extremism and fundamentalism."

These amendments have sparked public discussion on the issue of state-religion relations in the media, in academic and religious circles. The proposed draft complicated the registration procedure for religious associations and reportedly granted the Spiritual Board of Muslims the right to recommend any Muslim religious association for registration, oversee the construction of Mosques, censure Islamic literature and control Islamic education. Understandably, the Muftiyyat (Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan) was a staunch proponent of the amendments appealing to the government to restrain missionaries of the "non-traditional"²² denominations "proselytizing on the street" (Fagan 2001, www.starlightsite.co.uk).

The Kazakh-language press (particularly the newspapers *Ana Tili*, *Turkistan*, *Zhas Alash*, *Qazaq Adebieti*) also expressed unequivocal support for the government proposed amendments. The rhetoric of the Kazakh press depicted the attraction of Kazakh youth to new religions as a result of moral degradation and a rupture of traditions in society. The potential conversion of Kazakhs from Islam was identified as one of the serious threats to the national unity and security of the newly-independent nation-state. The headline of an article in the *Ana Tili* newspaper in May, 2001 authored by Amankeldi Zhumashuly, for instance, read "To Allow Many Gods is a Threat to Our State." The article expressed support for the amendments but warned against the use of the term "fundamentalism," reasoning that it might be used against Islam (Zhumashuly 5)

Another piece in *Ana Tili* featured the activities of the Hare Krishna community, which, as it was reported, rented some 60 hectares of land on the outskirts of Almaty. The journalists

²² In Kazakhstan, Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity are considered "traditional" religious denominations.

spoke with ethnic Kazakh converts of Krishna and revealed further missionary plans to attract more followers from the natives. So, the aim of this article by Quliev was once again to raise public awareness of the "threat" posed by missionaries infringing on the faith and land of Kazakhs²³ (Quliev 7).

Similar opinions were expressed in a Russian-language article entitled "Christian Fundamentalism is a Threat to Kazakhstan's Security," published in the journal *Evrasiiskoe Soobshestvo* (Eurasian Community). The author, a young Kazakh political scientist, likewise disapproved of foreign missionaries who "cloud people's minds that were [already] poisoned by 70 years of Communism" and whose activities are frequently disguised as charities (168). Zhusupov called on society to actively resist the onslaught of the fundamentalist, extremist and sectarian movements, "which break our national values and infringe upon the traditional religion." (171) Government officials, although without overt nationalistic rhetoric, made a similar point about the potential danger to the public and state security posed by non-traditional denominations²⁴.

This anxiety on the part of Kazakh nationalists and the government about potential conversion of Kazakhs into other religions received coverage by the *Keston News Service*, a London based organization monitoring religious freedom in the former Communist countries. The service cited a Baptist missionary who stated that "the conversion of Kazakhs to Protestantism evokes the greatest opposition among officials." He said "Astana is interpreting the fact that some 8000 Kazakhs became Protestants as a virtual threat to national security" (Rotar 2001). Similarly, a spokesman for the country's Hare Krishna community, Bashir Damir

²³ The activities of Krishnaite community in the district of Kaskeleng on the outskirts of Almaty have continued to stir the public opinion up till now. In 2003 residents of Kaskeleng have filed multiple complaints against the organization and finally brought it to an administrative trial for the misuse of "agricultural land." The case has been profiled by liberal advocates as religious prosecution and the controversy has been widely covered in the press and televised on national channels.

²⁴ The Minister of Information Muhtar Qulmuhamed wrote an article in *Ana Tili* (April 4, 2002), and the Department Head of the Council for Relations with Religious Associations wrote articles in *Kazakhstanskaja Pravda* (January 13, 2001) and *Mysl'* (May, 2001) explaining the rationale behind the introduction of the amendments to the Law on Religion. The officials maintain that the government has been pursuing "public interests" of the majority of the people following traditional denominations of Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity.

Muratuly, went on record as saying, "I am an ethnic Kazakh and, of course, the fact that I have become a follower of Krishna has made my compatriots unhappy...To the authorities I remain, as a follower of Krishna, a second class person" (Rotar).

With the exception of the Russian Orthodox Church, which expressed reserved support for the amendments, all other Christian associations within the country (such as the largely Protestant Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan, and the Emmanuel Christian Society for Evangelization and Charitable Activity) vehemently opposed and campaigned against the amendments. On their side were also international human rights organizations (e.g. the Helsinki Committee) and liberal political and academic circles which criticized the amendments as a violation of constitutionally granted religious freedom.

During public discussions of the amendments, Professor Artem'ev, a full member of the Kazakh Academy of Science and a religious studies expert, argued in the journal *Saiasat* that the terms "traditional" and "non-traditional" confessions should be left outside the terminology of the secular state constitution, which claims to treat all religions equally. Artem'ev charged that the proposed amendments are beneficial to radical nationalists, whose "ultimate goal is to create a mono-national Kazakhstan," and to the head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims who wants to replace, what he termed a traditional "sufi-sunni version of Islam that exists in Kazakhstan" with "classical Arab Islam." Artem'ev also charged that the Grand Mufti Derbisaliev was not competent, as he does not have a theological education, and that his "fondness of everything Arab must stem from his professional interests as an Arabist" (Artem'ev 46). Putting forward a similar argument, Roman Podoprighora, a lawyer, who was engaged in lobbying against the amendments wrote in *Saiasat* that while the government appeals to the European history of secularism, where many states identified themselves with a particular religion while proclaiming themselves secular, Kazakhstan has to be careful when adopting the experience of the European states, where centralized religious institutions were deep-rooted, unlike those in Kazakhstan (Podoprighora 69).

The amendments had been discussed in media and public forums and revised several times between 1999 and 2002 under the scrutiny from the OSCE, and international and local human rights associations. Finally, in 2002 the Constitutional Court found the amendments, which had already passed through parliament, to be in violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of consciousness. Thus, the 1992 Law on Religion, which was identified by Oslo-based Forum 18 as one of the most liberal in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), remained in effect (http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=249).

Although the government proposed amendments were not legalized (not in the least because of the pressure exerted by the international organizations), the state has tacitly pursued a strategy of sanctioning the “desirable” and preventing “undesirable” religious activity. Thus, the relationship between state and religion has remained highly contested and the debate about the role of religion in the society and the limits of state interference in religious affairs has continued.

Although secularism is deeply entrenched in the legal system, the Kazakh government has been also eager to emphasize that Kazakhstan is a country with a clear Muslim majority. As such, it upholds certain Islamic symbols such as gaining membership in the OIC, and swearing the Presidential oath on the Quran. Kazakhstan’s Islamic identity is constantly referred to when it comes to establishing contacts with the Islamic World and Middle Eastern countries. For instance, during a state visit to Saudi Arabia in February 2004, President Nursultan Nazarbaev made *‘umrah* and reportedly performed all obligatory prayers while in Saudi Arabia.²⁵

The central Muslim institution of the country, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan, as a semi-official organization under the aegis of the state, regulates most Muslim activity in the country (authorizing mosque construction, overseeing Islamic education, and censoring Islamic literature) and enjoys state support in this capacity. In 2001, for instance, in a speech addressed to the local *akims* (mayors) President Nazarbaev himself said that all mosques

²⁵ The Muslim community in Kazakhstan rejoiced upon seeing the video where the Kazakhstani delegation was praying, and enthusiastically welcomed this expression of Muslim identity by the government.

should be under the auspices of the (SBMK) Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan (Fagan 2001). Along with the Russian Orthodox Church SBMK plays a prominent role in public life. The chief mufti and the Orthodox archbishop are invited to almost all state ceremonies. The President of Kazakhstan also has a final say in 'electing' the head of the Spiritual Board of Muslims. For instance, according to information from insiders, in 2000 President Nazarbaev personally held interviews with all potential candidates, before allowing to proceed with the "elections"²⁶ of Absattar Derbisaliyev, a PhD in Arab Studies from Moscow University and a former dean of the Oriental School at the Kazakh State University. Although his lack of religious credentials raised some questions, his organizational skills and ability to deal with the outside secular world proved beneficial, for elevating the Muftiyyat's (SBMK) profile.

Anti-terror Campaign

With the declaration of the War on Terror in the wake of September 11 terrorist attacks and the threat of Islamic extremism looming large in Central Asia, Kazakhstan's government had to articulate its stance towards Islamic extremism. Until very recently, a reliance on repression and mass hunt of Islamic extremists and fundamentalists has not been a feature of Kazakhstani policies towards Islam. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir²⁷ party, feared by all the Central Asian governments, has not been outlawed here till the very beginning of this year [2005]. The members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, once caught giving out extremist literature, were brought to trial mostly on administrative

²⁶ I am putting 'elections' in quotation marks because these are more staged than real elections. Who is going to be elected is decided in advance.

²⁷ Hizb-ut-Tahrir is a global Islamic party which wants to establish a Universal Islamic Caliphate. One of the most interesting aspect of HT is the marked resemblance between its vocabulary and argumentation, and the rhetoric of Soviet Communism. It denounces capitalism and US imperialism in identical terms. Its appeal in Central Asia could be reducible to a longing for the stable, universalist characteristics of the Khilafah to replace the chaos that followed the breakdown of the Soviet empire.

charges²⁸, although a few of them were convicted for an "attempt to overthrow a constitutional order" and sentenced to short prison terms.

The soft policies of Kazakhstan with regards to Islamic extremism has become a source of contention with Uzbekistan, with the latter blaming Kazakh authorities for neglect of extremist activities aimed against the Uzbek government. Most recently Uzbekistani authorities charged that the explosions in Tashkent in the spring and summer of 2004 had been organized by terrorists trained in camps within Kazakhstani territory. Indeed, two of the terrorists-kamikadzes involved in explosions in Tashkent turned out to be citizens of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan also had to extradite five more citizens who, as the Uzbek authorities alleged, were involved in preparing terrorist acts in Uzbek territory.

Despite the relatively tolerant stance of Kazakhstan concerning the threat of Islamic extremism, the war on terror had taken its toll on Islamic activities in the country. It seems that for reasons pertaining more to the geo-political rather than internal situation, the government has had to invoke Islamic extremism as a major security threat. However, thus far when Kazakh authorities have moved to fight "Islamic extremism," they have done so in a clumsy and haphazard manner. In one instance, a "terrorist camp" uncovered in the mountainous Jambul region in cooperation with the Uzbek security forces turned out to be a Nurcu summer camp for children. Already, this kind of Kazakh-Uzbek "cooperation" has spread fear and further ethnicization of Islam in Kazakhstan, with Kazakh Muslims viewing their Uzbek counterparts with suspicion. Reportedly, in Kazakh religious circles people are warned of the potential risks of communicating with Uzbeks: "If an Uzbek approaches you, he must work for SNB (Uzbek National Security) himself, or he is followed by SNB agents."

Since 2001 the government has also moved to restrict Arab missionary activities. Allegedly, several Saudi and Kuweiti Arab charity funds have been closed down without due consideration. The president of the Kazakh-Arab University in Chymkent complained on

²⁸ In 2004, 64 members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir were brought to administrative responsibility in Southern Kazakhstan. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, December 02, 2004)

television in April 2005 that the studies at the department of religion at the university were terminated by authorities groundlessly, solely because of the department's association with Arabs and Islam (Sostoianie_KZ).

A Turkish student of Islam in Central Asia, Cengiz Surucu of Indiana University shared his personal encounter of the "war on terror" Central Asian style:

Since a radical Islamic insurgency is underway in some regions of Central Asia, Kazakhstani law enforcement authorities seem to have developed a handy definition of terrorist suspects: Middle Easterners. I am originally from Eastern Anatolia and I have a facial appearance of a Middle Easterner, so almost every time I came across a police officer on the street, my appearance made me a suspect. Once I was detained on the Uzbek border by three counter-terrorism agents of Kazakhstan and had a two-hour long no-destination interrogation ride along cotton fields." (Surucu 13)

Privately some Kazakhstani officials admit that in the context of globalization and American imperialism the mushrooming of Western religious "sects" pose a greater threat to national stability in Kazakhstan than Hizb-ut-Tahrir, or any other forms of "Islamic extremism." However, on larger political arena the fear of Islamic extremism remains wide-spread. This fear, coupled with limited knowledge and expertise on the part of the government in dealing with "new" Islam may produce an overreaction reminiscent of the Soviet-style repression of unsanctioned Islamic activities.

Chapter IV

ACADEMIC DEBATES ON THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN THE MAKING OF KAZAKH IDENTITY

Because of the thorough secularization of Central Asia during the Soviet era and its isolation from the rest of the Muslim world, Islam in Kazakhstan is significantly divorced from the Muslim intellectual debates on the issues of Islam and secularism, and Islam and democracy which are taking place in the Middle East, South-East Asia and the West.

The Islamic discourse in Kazakhstan is essentially a part of the nationalist discourse on contemporary Kazakh identity. The quest to recover Kazakh identity (the assumption is that it was lost during the colonial period) eventually leads to the issue of an Islamic component of it.

According to the constructivist theory of nationalism, all nationalisms have a very specific relation to "tradition." They represent themselves as standing for tradition, which is in fact not so much "the tradition" as reinvention of it (Mossad 70). As Elie Kedourie said, "Nationalists make use of the past in order to subvert the present" (Kedourie 61).

With the regard to the evaluation of the role of Islam in the making of Kazakh identity, we see two conflicting currents of the intellectual debate, which can be best described by the 19th century Russian intellectual dichotomy of slavianophiles/ "pochvenniki" (literally "people of the soil") versus "zapadniki" ("Westernizers"). Probably it is not a coincidence, but a result of the deliberate ideological position vis-à-vis the nationalizing state that "pochvenniki" (in this case, Islamo-nationalists) who assign Islam a central role in the making of Kazakh identity usually turn out to be government supporters, while "Westernizers" (liberals), who assign Islam only a marginal role, are mainly found in the opposition.

There is no doubt that Kazakh historians and writers such as Qalmuqan Isabai, Nazira Nurtazina, Marat Laimullin, who consider Islam to be the major spiritual tradition of Kazakhs

throughout their history as a "nation"²⁹," wittingly or unwittingly become active participants in the re-islamicization process. Their reassessment of the Russian Imperial and Soviet historiography is, in a way, a response to the intense need by Kazakhs to rediscover their Islamic identity outside of Russian colonial representation.

The established position in Russian and Soviet historiography concerning Kazakh Islam was that although Kazakhs started to adopt Islam as early as the 8th century, Islamic consciousness never deeply penetrated their way of life and their world outlook. Apparently, this trend of describing Kazakhs as only "superficially" Muslims started with Russian orientalists who came to the Kazakh steppe in the beginning of the 19th century. One such orientalist, Levshin, in his (1832) Opisanie Kyrgyz-Kaisachih Ord I Stepei (The Description of Kyrgyz-Kaysak Hordes and Steppes) wrote that the spiritual life of nomads was filled with beliefs in shamans, "saints and half-saints" and it was rare to meet an observant Muslim among them (Levshin 78). This view was also supported by the Russian educated ethnographer Chokan Valikhanov, an ethnic Kazakh, who in his Sledy Shamnizma u Kazahov (Traces of Shamanism among Kazakhs) wrote that although Kazakhs proclaimed themselves Muslims, in fact, they retained their pre-Islamic shamanistic beliefs. According to Valikhanov, for Kazakhs Islam was just "a sound, a phrase" but the ideas behind the terms were really shamanistic. For instance, they called the spirits of the dead ancestors "aruah" and evil spirits – "jins" and "shaytans" (49).

Valikhanov also wrote that, "Among the Kyrgyz³⁰ there is still many who don't know the name of Muhammad, and shamans continue to have their roles in many place." (71) Today, many Kazakh nationalist and Western historians point out that Valikhanov's view was very much informed by the Russian colonial Islamophobia of the 19th century and his vision about where the path of progress laid for Kazakh people. The author of the Islamization of Golden Horde, Devin DeWeese, writes that Chokan Valikhanov was "an extreme example of a

²⁹ The tribes (Qypshaq, Arghyn, Dulat and others.) which made a core of the Kazakh nation were already Islamicized by the time they joined the confederation of Kazakh khanate.

³⁰ In the 19th century Russian colonial literature Kazakhs were called Kyrgyz, and the Kyrgyz were called Kara-Kyrgyz or Mountain Kyrgyz.

Europeanized Qazaq opponent of Islam.” He continues, “Valikhanov’s hostility towards Islam (and its “fanaticism”), he writes, is accompanied by an insistence (or perhaps wish) that Islam was never strong among the steppe nomads, but he is at least open in his hope that Russian education will prevent the emergence of a Shamil (the leader of anti-Russian Muslims resistance in the North Caucasus until 1859) among Qazaqs” (DeWeese 21). Valikhanov’s vision for the enlightenment of Kazakhs, which, he believed, would be achieved only through de-Islamization, is evident in his article O Musul’mantsve v Stepī (About Muslimness in the Steppe) where he advocates the closure of all Islamic schools in the steppe in favor of Russian schools (Valikhanov 71).

This trend of interpreting Kazakh Islam as “syncretic” and “heterodox” compared to the Islamic practices of, for instance, the neighboring sedentary Uzbeks (then called *Sarts*) and Tatars, has continued through the Soviet times till the present. Drawing on Russian orientalist material on Kazakhs’ religion, a Kazakh historian Shaikemelev in his contribution to (2001) Islam i Hristianstvo: Duhovanaia Consolidacia Narodov Kazahstana (Islam and Christianity, the Spiritual Consolidation of the People of Kazakhstan) published by the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, again makes a conclusion that Kazakh religion has been a mixture of “pre-Islamic elements and Islamic doctrine: animism, sufism, and belief in Tangri [Ancient Turkic God] and, he emphasizes that all these beliefs have peacefully coexisted... in nomad’s consciousness.” (Shaikemelev 142)

The view that nomadic Kazakhs were not “really” Muslims has been contested in post-independence Kazakh historiography. The authors of (1996) Qazhygha Barghan Qazaqtar (“Kazakhs who made Hajj”), Qalmuqan Isabai and Sapar Baizhan-Ata, criticize Russian orientalist opinion that Kazakhs somehow never took Islam seriously. The authors suggest that the reason for such a view must have been a prejudice held by Russian orientalist against the Turkic and Mongol nomadic civilization. The Russians, the authors maintain, thought that it was impossible to institutionalize Islam without stone-built towns, *mesjids* and *madrasas*. In order to

refute this misconception, Isabai and Baizhan-Ata cite the 19th century Kazakh nobleman, Shon Bei of the Qarzhas clan, who reportedly told Russian officials that although Kazakhs didn't have mosques they had prayed in their nomadic tents for 1000 years (18-19). As a proof of a long-standing Islamic tradition among Kazakhs the authors also refer to one of the main symbols of the Kazakh nation---*shejire* (geneology). Because the Kazakh nation was created as a confederation of different Turkic-Mongol clans, the history of the clans is really intertwined with the history of the nation. Like nations, clans also have their foundational myths. So, the authors put forward an argument that if Kazakh clans' history has a religious coloration (like, if *shejire* says that a clan originates from a person who possessed some sort of religious charisma³¹), it means that the clans were Islamicized well before their incorporation into the Kazakh nation (16).

Another Kazakh historian who consistently argued that Islam had been deeply entrenched in the Kazakh steppe is Nazira Nurtazina. In her book (2000) Islam v Istorii Srednevekovogo Kazakhstana (Islam in the History of Medieval Kazakhstan), she describes how throughout history, Kazakh elite—mullas, Sufi leaders, and especially khans (starting with the khans of the Golden Horde), had a very sophisticated understanding of Islam. Historically, it has been well-documented, Nurtazina writes, that representatives of the ruling Chingizid clan were indeed very observant Muslims (202-205, 225). For instance, the 16th-19th century letters by Kazakh khans are full of the citations from Quran, references to hijra time and so on (211, 218). Some of the so-called 'founding fathers' of the Kazakh nation such as Kasym Khan (1511-1518) and Tawwakal (Taukel) Khan (1582-1598) were *murids* (students) of Naqshbandi sheikhs (208, 212). Taukel Khan also elaborated the first written Law of the land "Zheti Zharghy" (seven pillars) based on the major tenets of the Islamic law (Nurtazina 215-217). Nurtazina writes that allegiance of Kazakh Khans to the Russian Emperors was sworn on Quran (218), and resistance against Russian colonization was also expressed in Islamic terms as a struggle of Muslims

³¹ Isabai writes that his clan of Arghyn was founded in the 13th century by two men named Daiyrgyzha and Qaraqozha. The name "qozha" here implies that a person was of Arab descent.

against non-Muslims. For instance, a Kazakh nobleman Kenesary sultan (a cousin of Chokan Valikhanov), who fought against the tsarist army, had many Kyrgyz and Bukharans among his guerillas (225).

Nurtazina argues that on the popular level, Kazakhs were also very religious. She writes that every kazakh child was taught to pronounce *kalima-i-shahada* in Arabic. A native language version of *shahada* saying "Urqym—musulman, Dinim—Islam, Alla--bir, Quran--shyn, Payghambar--khaq" also existed (230). People, who were lax in observing their Islamic duties, were labeled *beinamaz* (meaning "without prayer") (226, 231). The theme of being diligent in Islamic duties was frequently emphasized in the Kazakh poetry, for instance by a famous Kazakh poet of the 18th century Bukhar Zhyrau (219). Even such an ardent opponent of Islam as Chokan Valikhanov, Nurtazina says, had to admit that among Kazakhs "those who don't pray five-times *namaz* and fast 30-days *oraza* are not respected and have no voice in communal affairs" (Valikhanov as quoted in Nurtazina 226).

In her argument, Nurtazina again reiterates the point made by Isabai and Baizhan-Ata that Russian orientalists came to erroneous conclusions about the role of religion and religious education in the steppe because they didn't fully understand the nuances of Islamic practices (e.g. the fact that there is no need to have a *masjid* to proceed with individual or even congregational prayers as "namaz could be made any place inside or outside") (231)

In her works, Nurtazina emphasizes the spiritual dimension of the rediscovery of the Islamic history of Central Asia and Islamic identity, she writes that the renaissance of Islam should be understood as "the renaissance of the moral values and the acquisition of faith and its byproducts: goodness, compassion and love for humanity (Nurtazina as quoted in Rorlich 161).

Western scholars have also produced important studies challenging the prevailing assumption in most Russian and Western historiography that Kazakhs were not truly Muslims such as Devin DeWeese's (1994) Islamization of Golden Horde, Allen Frank's (2001) Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia and (2004) Materials for the Islamic History of

Semipalatinsk. DeWeese in his monograph on the Islamization of Golden Horde (on the territory of today's Kazakhstan) criticizes the view "intent upon minimizing the historical role of Islam in Inner Asia," which, he writes, managed to "successfully reinforce the standard assumption of 'light' Islamization in the region." (52) This thesis on "light Islamization" and "heterogeneity" of the Islamic beliefs in Inner Asia, he says, is based on the supposition that "Islam in local setting isolated from the urban intellectual centers of 'Islamic civilization' is essentially ignorant, substandard and uninformed by the richness of intellectual life and social relations thought to be limited to urban settings" (52).

Considering the issue of "light Islamization" within the historical-religious context, DeWeese says that

....from an Islamic perspective there is no such thing as the purely formal or nominal or external adoption of Islam that is so often noted with disdain by students of Inner Asia. Even a conversion of an individual or of a community--that is 'imperfect' from the standpoint of either full ritual attentiveness or inner spirituality is nevertheless a first step toward deeper religiosity, and in any case should not be dismissed or belittled as much as it is, in however rudimentary a form, a token of God's grace and solicitude towards his creature. To come full circle to our emphasis upon communal status, what that "imperfect" conversion signals, above all, is indeed God's greatest gift from the Islamic perspective: the conferral of membership in a salvific community. (26)

He writes that such an approach to conversion or belief is already "sanctioned within Islamic tradition" by the Hanafi school. "Asked about 'the status of a Muslim in the territory of polytheism who affirms Islam as a whole but does not know or affirm Koran or any religious duties of Islam,' Abu Hanifa affirmed that such a person should be counted as believer³²." (26)

³²DeWeese probably refers here to Hanafi *ta'aruf lughawi* (language definition) of who should be considered *mu'min*. According to Abu Hanifa, the condition for being *mu'min* is having 'iman, 'amal [observing rituals] is not a condition: guidance in faith ('iman) and guidance in works ('amal) are two different things. You can give the title of *mu'min* to a person who is unaware of duties? Such a person is ignorant so far as duties are concerned, but is all the same a believer in respect of affirmation. God Himself has made these distinctions in the Qur'an. Would you equate a person who refuses to acknowledge God and His Apostle with one who, though a believer, is ignorant of practical duties...I assert that all people of the Qibla are *mu'mins* and that none of them becomes an infidel by omission of works [observing rituals]. He who has faith and also performs his duties is without doubt a *mu'min* and destined for Paradise. He who is devoid of both faith and works is an infidel and destined for Hell. He who has faith, but omits to act is certainly a Muslim, but a sinful one. It is up to God to punish or forgive him. (quoted at the Hanafi Madhhab: My Love and My Choice, Ed. Syed Muntaz Ali, available at <<http://muslim-canada.org/mylove.htm>>)

Also emphasizing the importance of the internal perspective, Allen Frank, in his works (2001) Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia and (2004) Materials for the Islamic History of Semipalatinsk, turns to the available local sources, such as manuscripts left by local mullas and imams. In these works he likewise criticizes the "prejudice widely held among students of Kazakh History that supposes the Kazakhs were somehow 'superficially' Muslim" (Frank 310-311). According to him, Russian historiography developed such a position "out of desire to de-Islamize these societies" (Frank 266)

In the limited space accorded to discussions of religious activities or religious life in ethnographies of the Tatars and Bashkirs, and especially of the Kazakhs, discussions of religious life were restricted to brief phenomena, such as the ancestor cult, demonology, pilgrimage, and especially agricultural calendar festivals, shamanism and virtually every other aspect of human activity that may have had religious significance to a Muslim, and may have been expressed in Islamic terms, were instead defined as "pre-Islamic". Whatever Islamic elements may have existed among these manifestations of popular religious consciousness were simply dismissed as a surface layer of Islamic "ideology" upon a phenomenon that was really pre-Islamic, and national. In these ethnographic depictions of the religious life of imperial Russia's Muslim villagers was reduced to a childish world of belief in spirits, hobgoblins, and leprechauns, without any reference to the Islamic institutions and ideals that formed the core of these communities' identities. These ethnographies all but ignored the presence and fundamental role of Islamic institutions at the village level, which included mosques, madrasas, imams, mu'adhin, hagiolatry, and Arabic, Turkish and Persian Islamic literature. (Frank 9-10)

The academic debate over whether or not Kazakhs throughout history were indeed "real" Muslims has been taken on another level of the current Kazakh intellectual discourse, where journalists, analysts, academicians and government officials all compete to define what is "traditional" Kazakh Islam. Since the beginning of independence the name of Yassawi³³ (Khazrat-i-Turkestan) turned into a brand name of "Kazakh national Islam." Many studies have been written on the life and work of Yassawi since then. Most of them give Yassawi credit "for

³³ Hakan Yavuz and Etga Ugur consider Ahmet Yassawi's legacy to be one of the major intellectual sufi sources of Turkish Islam:

Ahmet Yesevi (d. 1166) became very influential among Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes by reinterpreting Islam to accommodate nomadic lifestyles. He did not seek to negate old customs and traditions but rather used them to disseminate Islamic teaching. His teachings were collected by his followers in a book, known as a Divan-i Hikmet, one of the first literary Turkish works on Islam. Even though Yesevi knew Arabic and Persian, he wrote his work in the vernacular dialect to communicate with the people of the region. Many Central Asian Turks regard the teachings of Ahmet Yesevi as a part of their shared Turkic tradition. (Yavuz 230)

finding compromise between Islamic doctrine and nomads' pre-Islamic beliefs" (Pyliov 3). According to this scholarship, Yassawi was very successful in preaching Islam to Turkic nomads because among other things he talked in their own language; he allowed the people to continue the tradition of figurative arts; he tolerated the cult of ancestors and nature, while connecting them with the worship of the one God; he avoided imposing certain aspects of the *Sharia*, which could go against nomadic Turkic traditions. The modern government supports such a scholarship and also promotes the interpretation of Yassawiyya teaching as a "Kazak way to Islam". For example, Yassawi is mentioned in President Nazarbaev's book *The Flow of History* as one of the pillars' of the Kazakh spirituality. The book says, "Islamic culture of the medieval Kazakhstan had its own specifics, which had little to do with the normative Islamic doctrine. In Yassawiyya, the elements of tangrianism [the ancient Turks believed in the God of Kok-Tangri] preserved their meaning as symbols of the nomadic Turks' philosophy" (Quoted in Bondarenko 27).

The figure of Yassawi and his legacy have become a part of the Kazakh national history course, as it is taught in the secondary school. A teacher of history in the Russian lyceum in Astana (the Kazakh history is taught in both Kazakh and Russian schools), Svetlana Kuznecova, told me that she regularly goes with her pupils on tours to "holy places" of Turkestan, visiting *mazars* of Yassawi, his teacher Arystan Bab (also pronounced Arslan Bab) and his parents.

In 2002, on one of the Kazakh national TV channels there emerged a group which claimed to be followers of the Yassawiya tariqa. A host of a religious program on that channel Sayat Ybyray, also a member of the tariqa, would advocate that there is no need for the Muftiyyat to send students to the Middle East to study Islam, because Kazakhs have their own heritage of Islam, i.e. Yassawi writings and teachings, which they should learn and popularize. The tariqa managed to find the support among some high-ranking Kazakh officials such as then prime-minister Imanghali Tasmaghambetov. The conflict between the Yassawi tariqa and the Muftiyyat supported by all the mainstream orthodox community played out in the Kazakh-

language press and on the internet forums. In one of the articles published at www.navi.kz Dias Abu Ahmad, one of the new intellectuals of the Islamic community in Kazakhstan, argued that Sufi tariqa can never be a "national religion" because it has a pyramidal structure, and throughout the history has been an elite (not a popular) undertaking. He concluded his article saying that the self-declared Yassawi order that appeared in Kazakhstan is not in fact a Sunni order at all, but a group of people with almost no knowledge of Islam who decided to exploit people's naiveté and religious ignorance of some officials for the purposes of their own career advancement.

The Muftiyyat deplored Yassawi tariqa leaders for profiteering from organizing "small *hajjs*" to Turkestan, and misguiding the public. At one of the news conferences he asked journalists not to call Turkestan "second Mecca," and publicly corrected one of them that the Yassawi place is not a mausoleum but a *masjid*. Some journalists afterwards interpreted these words as an infringement on "Kazakh traditional" Islam (Abdulin 19).

From inquiring into what was the Kazakh Islamic tradition there is only one step to questioning what role Islam should play in the nation-building process. This is exactly the question which concerns ideologues of all persuasions. Prof. Azimbay Ghali, a writer who represents a nationalist wing, says that Islam is the very essence of the Kazakh nation, which should consolidate itself around three principles: "State, Language, and Islam"³⁴ (Ghali 2003). He contends that "the degree of the Kazakhs' religiosity has been underestimated by historians while, in fact, Islam had become a state religion on the territory of Kazakhstan starting with the Qarakhanids [the 9th century]." "Yassawi Islam, he writes, is a pillar of the Kazakhness along with the Kazakh tradition, language, history, territory and the state. The mosque is the only place where the Kazakh language has gained its full status" (Ghali 2001, 20).

Ghali also argues that the position of Islam in Kazakhstan has been strengthened in the last decade. "We can assert that from a world religion Islam is becoming a national religion," he

³⁴ This is in a way a remake of the 19th century Russian "Orthodoxy, Tsardom and People"

writes, "The number of those fasting and observing rituals is growing year after year. The number of religious functionaries with proper Islamic education is also growing. The re-emerging religious intelligentsia is joining secular intelligentsia" (Ghali 2002, 45). He also attributes the reported decrease in alcoholism to the re-Islamization of society (Ghali 2003).

Political analysts and writers affiliated with the opposition usually take another side, maintaining that Islam should not and indeed cannot play any important role in the making of Kazakh national identity. For instance, opposition journalist Qazis Toghusbaev writes that Kazakhs have always had a "pagan attitude towards Islam." Kazakhs, he writes, traditionally distrusted ideological dogmas, thus they could never internalize Islamic ideology. As he points out, Kazakhs were "bad Muslims" and they were "bad communists" that is why there are so many former communists who have become Muslims today. He further charges that today, it is the Kazakh government which wants to Islamicize Kazakhs (Toghusbaev). This article by Toghusbaev, which was published at the interactive internet journal *Navigator* (www.navi.kz) provoked strong opinions from the readers. Many of the opinion givers said that if Toghusbaev himself is a 'mankurt'³⁵ and an atheist, he should not speak on behalf of the whole Kazakh nation and interpret what Islam means for Kazakhs (<http://www.navi.kz/articles/?artid=1560>).

The old argument that historically Islam did not deeply affect Kazakhs because of their nomadic way of life was also repeated by another oppositional figure --- the expert on Kazakh nomadism and historian, Nurbolat Masanov, who in an interview to the *Megapolis* newspaper stated that "Kazakhs have never been 100 percent Muslims." On the current religious situation in Kazakhstan, Masanov commented that Islam would not rise in Kazakhstan as it could not compete with nationalism and ethnocentrism. He also argued that the bulk of the Kazakh city-

³⁵ *mankurt* is a term which is often used to call culturally uprooted person 'without memory,' who doesn't speak his native language, doesn't respect traditions and prefer to be cosmopolitan rather than nationalistic. Originally, it was introduced in the novel by Chyngyz Aitmatov "When The Day Lasts Longer Than a Century."

dwellers are "of the atheistic orientation" (Omarova 2001). The editor of the Islamic Shapaghat-Nur magazine, Dias Abu Ahmed, wrote an op-ed piece in response to this interview, which was published on www.navi.kz. To counter Masanov's argument that Islam is a religion of marginal newly-urbanized elements, he referred to the statistics of the Ministry of Information, which showed that in Kazakhstan Islam is increasingly becoming the religion of the educated as the level of educational attainment among Muslims is higher than in with other religion, including the categories of "atheist" and "agnostic" (Abu Ahmad). In a personal interview with me in February 2004, he also stated that most of the Muslims of his circle -- active observant Muslims were born in the city.

Another article, which also provoked huge nationalist and Islamic sentiments at the Kazakh internet forums of www.kub.kz and www.navi.kz, was Masanov's "We are Marginalized People," where he argued that medieval Islamic cities in the territory of Kazakhstan, and subsequently Islamic culture had little impact on the nomads of the Kazakh steppe who didn't live in those cities (Masanov 2004). Many authors then blamed Masanov's attitude to Islam on his russified background and challenged him first to learn Kazakh fluently and then to read Kazakh literature including the heroic Kazakh eposes and *dastans* which are full of Islamic motives.

Conclusion

My analysis of the intellectual debates on the role of Islam in the making of Kazakh national identity shows that the government ideologists, Kazakh nationalists and "islamists" view Islam as an integral part of the Kazakh national identity. Some of them also make an attempt to "nationalize" Islam, by reinventing Yassawiyya teaching as a "Kazakh way to Islam." This trend very much corresponds to what, according to Van Der Veer, becomes of religion in the age of nationalism, when it is transformed into a "defining feature of the nation" along with

the language, history and other fields of disciplinary practices (Van Der Veer 21). Unlike many Islamic movements in other Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries, which have been positioning themselves against the secular state, Islamic forces of Kazakhstan are in alliance with the government against the liberal opposition, which is seen as "mankurt," anti-national and anti-Islamic.

The discussions about the role of Islam in the making of the Kazakh nation also reveal that nobody, not even the government, currently holds a monopoly on interpretation of what Islam means for the Kazakhs. Each side of the debate expresses a national point of view and promotes its own vision of the Kazakh Islamic tradition in order to justify its present ideological stance.

Chapter V

CENTRAL ASIAN ENCOUNTERS OF THE MIDDLE EAST: NATIONALISM, ISLAM AND POST-COLONIALITY IN AL-AZHAR³⁶

Many scholars have pointed out that religious practice in the post-Soviet space has its own peculiarities, resulting from the extremely secular environment created by the Soviet authorities. Although the state promoted atheism and Soviet propaganda could not eradicate faith in God, by prohibiting religious education and containing religion within the private sphere the authorities managed to create a profound ignorance of religious practices within the self-perceived religious communities. It was of course impossible that this religious ignorance would disappear overnight with the collapse of the Soviet Union. As far as the resurgence of Islamic identification is concerned, many educated people have perceived a lack of foundation in mass 'conversion' to Islam. I remember some friends of mine (professionals) sarcastically discussing the new 'fashion' among young people of going to the mosque on Fridays. One friend told me about some young women colleagues of his who usually dressed in a liberal fashion (mini-skirts) but who would put on scarves on Fridays to go to mosque to read the Quran³⁷ and give *sadaqa*. 'Is this Islam?' he asked me.

Widespread confusion about what constitutes right (orthodox) Islamic practice has been aggravated by a shortage of individuals capable of providing religious guidance. The handful of religious functionaries left over from the Soviet-era Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia³⁸ were not enough to satisfy the growing need for high-quality religious instruction and religious

³⁶ This chapter was published as an article in *Religion, State, & Society*, Vol.33, No.3, September 2005: 253-264

³⁷ There is a tradition in Kazakhstan of reading the Quran ('*Quran oqutu*') for the sake of deceased relatives.

³⁸ In the Soviet Union, after the initial phase of outright repression in 1920s-30s, the Soviet government returned to the Russian imperial tradition of regulating Muslim activities through muftiates (Spiritual Boards of Muslims). Four muftiates covering four regions were created in 1943: one based in Baku for Azerbaïdzhan, one in Dagestan for the Northern Caucasus, one in Ufa for European Russia and Siberia and one in Tashkent for the whole of Central Asia. After declaring independence in 1991, Kazakhstan established its own muftiate, independent of the muftiate in Tashkent. Its structure follows the country's administrative divisions, i.e. it also has district-region-centre subordination.

services. In addition, many of them had little credibility with the people either because of their past collaboration with the communist authorities or because of allegations of corruption. In the first years of independence Kazakhstan witnessed a boom in public Islamic activities such as the building of mosques³⁹, the opening of Islamic schools, and traveling to *haji*, *'umra*. Experiencing the shortage of individuals with proper religious knowledge, Kazakhstan, like the other Central Asia republics, turned to the Middle East as a provider of Islamic education. This was one aspect of the general trend among the Central Asian states to embrace the opportunity to reinforce and to assert their Islamic identity by renewing political and cultural relations with the rest of the Muslim world, from which they have been ideologically and physically isolated for 70 years.

Central Asian Identity and the Middle East: The Experience of Central Asian Students Studying at Al-Azhar

This chapter is based on the field work that I have done among the Kazakhstani students at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. My interviews with Central Asian students at Al-Azhar have exposed some ambivalent attitudes toward Egyptian Muslim society in general and about the Al-Azhar educational system⁴⁰ in particular. As a historic religious symbol of Islamic learning, Al-Azhar continues to attract Central Asian students. However, these students are often dissatisfied with the experience of the Al-Azhar program of religious education. Although my interviewees reveal much about the Azhari system of education and express criticism of Egyptian society, they reveal more than anything else something about the way Central Asian identity may respond to the Muslim 'other'.

Mona Abaza has reached somewhat similar conclusions about the experience of South

³⁹ In 1989 there were only 69 functioning mosques in Kazakhstan; in 2001 the Spiritual Board of Muslims reported that it had registered more than 1500 newly built mosques.

⁴⁰ In modern day Egypt, al-Azhar is not just a university, but a whole system of religious education, which exists along with the secular education system. As such it includes not only colleges but also secondary and high schools over the country, where people who lack access to secular education can study.

Asian students in the Middle East. She writes:

The 'imagery' of the Middle East in Southeast Asia entails an ambivalent and dialectical relationship of great appreciation as a center of 'high culture,' knowledge and religion and yet of dissatisfaction towards the current social and economic reality of the Middle Eastern countries; of compassion to the holy lands and yet aversion of the feudal traditions and violence of contemporary politics. (Abaza, 1994, p.108)

She also notes, however, that in Southeast Asia 'the experience of having lived or studied in Cairo or Mecca is a passport for religious and political credibility and activism' (Abaza, 1994, p.110). In the Central Asian context, although it might be too early for anyone to assess the prestige of Azhari or Medinan⁴¹ religious education, since educational connections between Central Asia and the Middle East have been reestablished only for a decade, I would say that the only 'passport' that Azhari education might give to its holders is into the clergy or the field of Oriental Studies. This is first and foremost because of the Central Asian secular socio-political environment.

In her article Abaza notes that in Southeast Asia 'the importation of Arab habits is quite often accepted and venerated since the Arabian desert is a cradle of Islam and thus gives great credibility to physically and psychologically "transformed" returning scholars and wanderers' (Abaza, 1994, p.109). Comparing my findings with Abaza's I would say that unlike Southeast Asian students, Central Asians have been quite reluctant to borrow anything from Arab culture apart from the language and knowledge of religious texts. Most of the Kazakh students I talked to drew a distinct line between themselves and the Egyptian environment around them. The general attitude amongst students was that they had come to Cairo to learn language skills and religious know-how that would confer a certain 'cultural capital' upon them back home. Although they regarded Egyptians as their co-religionists, they were eager to emphasize their difference from 'Arabs.'

⁴¹ Indeed, I would argue that students who came from Medina to Kazakhstan are looked upon suspiciously even in religious circles as having adopted Salafiyyah or Wahhabi ways.

One of the most interesting issues that I have sought to pursue in my research is the transformation of identity on an individual and group level when Central Asians travel to the Middle East. If we assume that they come to the Middle East with the manifest purpose of rediscovering and reinforcing their Islamic identity, what happens after people have studied and lived in the Middle East for a period of time?

As a theoretical framework for my interpretation of students' experiences I used works on social identity construction. At the simplest level, notes Jillian Schwedler, identity is how individuals and groups define themselves and their relations to others (Schwedler, 2001, p.2). Like individuals, groups strive to distinguish themselves positively from other groups (Seul, 1999, p.556). For Kazakhs in Kazakhstan the natural 'other' from which to distinguish oneself would be the Russians, who now constitute about 30 per cent of the population. One cannot overestimate the role of religion in this 'othering' process. Although in the secular environment of Kazakhstan people may relate to Islam on a very symbolic and nominal level, 'Muslimness' as such remains part and parcel of Kazakh identity, an essential attribute, which makes Kazakhs distinctive from the Russian other.

At the same time, when we refer to the role that 'the other' plays in one's identity construction, it seems we often underestimate the degree of interaction with 'the other', accommodation of 'the other', and even assimilation into 'the other'. Here, I think, Michael Rywkin provides a very insightful perspective into the nuances of identity construction in Soviet Central Asia.

We must accept the fact that despite regional differences, enhanced by ethnic factors, the Soviet way of life could not have failed to influence all but the most culturally isolated individuals. The resulting acculturation (as well as bilingualism that is part of it) does not necessarily lead to assimilation. On the contrary, a certain degree of acculturation might increase one's resistance to assimilation. Thus smoking instead of chewing tobacco, learning to drink vodka, or wearing European clothes at the office has even less assimilative effect than learning Russian as a second language...The Soviet Central Asian

is, of course, not simply a mirror image of his across-the-border coreligionists. He has acquired enough Soviet traits and Russian habits to make him distinctive. But in his opposition to the Russian *Homo sovieticus* he truly remains...*Homo islamicus*. (Rywkin, 1990, p.106)

According to information from my interviewees and some embassies, there are somewhere between 900 and 1000 students from the former Soviet Union (the Muslim regions of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) studying at the colleges and schools in Al-Azhar. All of these students have come to Egypt to pursue education in religion or Arab philology. The fact that thousands of students from around the world come to study at al-Azhar speaks of the high standing that al-Azhar enjoys in the Sunni Muslim world. At the same time, it is no secret that al-Azhar suffers from major inadequacies, such as a poor material and technical base, over-crowding, and a deteriorating quality of teaching. Incoming students very soon become aware of these shortcomings, as well as of the low prestige that al-Azhar has at home as an institution for the underprivileged.

As a rule, because of their poor Arab language skills, students from the former Soviet Union do not go directly to the college but start at the *thanawiyya* (high school), the *adadiyya* (primary school), or the *dirasa khasa* (preparatory school). This means that in order to gain a bachelor's degree from Al-Azhar they need to spend a total of six to nine years in the Azhari system.

The first group of 20 students from Kazakhstan came to al-Azhar in 1992. In accordance with an Egyptian-Kazakhstani intergovernmental agreement, al-Azhar would take a number of Kazakh students annually; they would be provided with a place to stay in the Madinat-al-Booth and receive free board and a stipend of \$ 25 per month⁴². Between 1992 and 1997 100 students from Kazakhstan studied at al-Azhar within the Azhari quota. However, most of them (about 90) dropped out after two to three years. I did not have an opportunity to talk to drop-out students

⁴² There are many more Kazakh students who come to Al-Azhar independently beyond the quota. Education at al-Azhar is free, and several religious trusts and foundations from the Gulf, such as the Al-Baptin foundation in Kuwait, help students to cover their living expenses.

personally, but those who remained listed poor living conditions, the different system of education, language problems and the harsh climate among the major reasons for students to drop out. I also think that the prospect of spending 6-9 years in Cairo may have not appealed to them. To be fair to Al-Azhar, it should be mentioned that there were a similar number of dropouts from secular Egyptian universities, particularly Cairo, Ayn Shams, Helwan, Tanta and Alexandria, where the Kazakh Ministry of Education also sent large groups of students in the mid-1990s⁴³. This fact, of course, tells of a major problem in Egyptian-Kazakhstani educational contacts⁴⁴.

When looking into the reasons for such a high withdrawal rate, I think, we also have to take into consideration the socio-economic environment from which the students are coming, which differs from country to country and even from region to region within a particular country, as well as between rural areas and the city. For instance, the largest group of Central Asians at Al-Azhar, numbering 250, is from Tajikistan. Tajikistan was the poorest and least developed republic in the USSR, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union it went through civil war and only now is undergoing a period of reconstruction. This situation in their home country, I presume, partly explains why the dropout rate among Tajik students is the lowest among post-Soviet students.

As of today, three Kazakhs have obtained a bachelor's degree from al-Azhar. All of them have returned home. The first graduate of Al-Azhar Qayrat, who is teaching at the Nur-Mubarak University⁴⁵, is known as an influential religious figure and despite his youth (he is 26) has many

⁴³ A teacher of Arabic at the Eurasian University in Kazakhstan told me that he was in the group of 140 students sent by the Kazakh Ministry of Education to Egypt in 1994; he said that only eight of them graduated.

⁴⁴ Despite the fact that Al-Azhar was chosen as an official site of religious education, today in Kazakhstan not Al-Azhar but Islamic University of Madina holds the lead in the number of graduates. Seven people have graduated from Madina versus three from Al-Azhar. Madina is the second most popular destination for Kazakh students to travel to study religion privately. The University of Madina has much better material base than Al-Azhar. The education at the Madinan University is also free and admitted students are provided with the stipend of \$ 220. According to information from the Kazakh graduates of the Islamic University in Madina, the application process there is more selective while education system is more effective than in Al-Azhar.

⁴⁵ Nur-Mubarak University, named after presidents Nursultan Nazarbaev and Hosni Mubarak, was founded in 2001 by the Kazakhstani-Egyptian intergovernmental agreement. It is considered to be an affiliate of al-Azhar.

followers. He is also the author of several religious books published in Kazakh. Currently there are 140 students from Kazakhstan studying within the Azhari system (this includes not only ethnic Kazakhs but also Uighurs, Dungans and Uzbeks); about 30 of them are at the college level. Half a dozen students are expected to graduate this year. I presume that the impact of Azhari students on Islamic revival and Islamic discourse in Kazakhstan will be felt ever more greatly as more and more students return home with a degree from Al-Azhar.

During my fieldwork in Al-Azhar in winter and spring of 2004, I came to know several Kazakh students closely. I would like to present profiles of some of them.

Learning Religion but Keeping the Culture: a Kazakh Student Family at Al-Azhar

Marat is one of the married students at Al-Azhar, he is 40 years old, and when I interviewed him in Spring 2004 he was a fourth-year student at the Kuliyyat Usul-ud-Din⁴⁶. He came to al-Azhar some eight years ago and received a scholarship from the Kuwaiti Baythat-ul-Baptin Foundation, which pays the rent, \$ 40 per month stipend, and reimbursement for an air ticket home once a year. Marat is a professional flute player. He lives in *Hai Thamin* with his wife, Reza, also a professional musician (a pianist), and two small children. Marat and Reza consider themselves to be the most educated and 'advanced' among Kazakhstani students as they were raised in the city and had a good education before to coming to al-Azhar. Marat does not get along well with the cohort of students (about 20 people) of rural background from southern Kazakhstan who have taken on the responsibility of 'supervising' the Kazakh community at Al-Azhar. Perhaps the north-south division within Kazakh society comes into play here⁴⁷. Marat says that southern student leaders (from the first wave of students sent to Al-Azhar), who were

⁴⁶ Kazakh students are studying at the colleges of Usul-ud-Din, Sharia, Sharia wa Qanun, Dawa and Lughat-al-Arabiyyah.

⁴⁷ There is a widely acknowledged division within Kazakhstan (as indeed there is in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) between the industrially developed North and the traditional agrarian South. It is in fact something of an oversimplification, as there are pockets of greater and lesser development in both North and South.

designated by the embassy to help incoming students and represent Kazakh students before sponsor foundations, abuse this power by obtaining scholarships for their relatives⁴⁸ and do a disservice to young students by preventing them from socializing within al-Azhar's cosmopolitan environment under the pretext that they might join some 'radical' foreign group.

Like the wives of many students in al-Azhar, Marat's wife Reza went to study Arabic and religion on her own; she has excelled in learning the whole of the Quran by heart⁴⁹. She has a certificate of *Hafeeza* from a *markaz*. She is popular among Kazakh, Russian and Uzbek women who live in her area; they often come to talk to her and seek her advice. However, despite her enthusiasm for learning Arabic and studying religion, Reza has quite a critical attitude towards Egyptian society. In our conversations she indicated that she was wary of some Egyptian customs. For instance, she said she did not like extensive kissing when greeting people; she thought that Egyptian hospitality was fake; she also said she had problems with the low hygiene standards of the people living around her. In one of our women's meetings she and several other female students expressed distaste for the Egyptian *Aid-al-Idha* custom whereby a whole family gathers to watch the act of slaughtering a sheep. They recalled how in Kazakhstan the act of slaughtering is only men's business, performed in the backyard, while women and children never watch the 'death of the sheep'. My Egyptian neighbor Du'a was present during this discussion and I translated to her (into English) what we were talking about among ourselves. Du'a said that there was a *Hadeeth* explaining why people should take part in, and watch, the slaughter of a sheep. None of us had anything to say in the face of the authority of an educated native Arab speaker, except for Reza, who softly doubted the existence of such a *Hadeeth* by asking Du'a what selection the *Hadeeth* in question was from and through whom it was related. Du'a did not know the answer. This incident shows how Reza is not just a passive recipient of the knowledge imparted to her. It seems that she always critically engages with the religious knowledge and

⁴⁸ Most of the male students who are over 25 (which is about the half of all the Kazakh students in Al-Azhar) are married.

⁴⁹ At Al-Azhar foreign students are not now required to know the whole of the Quran by heart even at college level.

needs a '*daleel*' (in this context a proof of the authenticity of the *Hadeeth* in question) in order to verify it.

The way Reza and Marat give *tarbiyyah* to their children is indicative of the interplay between the religious and national identities of Kazakh students at Al-Azhar. Once I was present when the children were told a bedtime story about a beautiful place called Astana (the northern capital of Kazakhstan) where Maryam (4 1/2 years old) and Muhammed (3 years old), both born in Cairo, would go and play at snowballs with their cousins. What was quite a 'cultural shock' for me, however, was that at a certain point in the story there appeared a dragon which would eat only non-Muslim children.

Turkish Islam versus Arab Islam

In the article entitled 'Is There a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus' a well-known author on modern Islam Hakan Yavuz breaks up the overarching concept of 'Islamic world' into seven 'diverse, competing' and even 'conflicting' zones of Islam -- Arab, Persian (Shi'i), Turkish, South Asian, Malay-Indonesian, African and Minority (Diaspora) -- and defines the geographic area of Turkish Islam (Turk Musulmaligi) as stretching from Balkans to Central Asia. He especially points that intellectual roots of the Turkish Islam start from the Sufi networks of Central Asia (particularly Ahmet Yassawi) Central Asian *Ulama*. (Buhari, Mansur Maturidi etc), and are specifically tied to the Hanafi mazhab, which is, according to Yavuz, was the most liberal of Islamic schools and ready to integrate local traditions. (Yavuz 213-233)

During fieldwork in al-Azhar, I unexpectedly came across the issue of Central Asian-Turkish Islamic connections, because many Kazakh students in al-Azhar are associated with the Turkish community there.

Erkebulan, 22, is a third-year Kazakh student in Kuliyyat-Usul-ud-Din. He came to Al-Azhar five years ago immediately after high school and, like Marat, received a scholarship from the Baythat-ul-Baptin Foundation. He is evidently very capable, having finished *adadiyyah* (primary school) and *thanawiyya* (high school) in just two years. He can read Arabic, Turkish and Ottoman Turkish. He lives with Turkish students (five Turks and a Kyrgyz live with him in his flat) and is apparently a Nurcu network member⁵⁰. Talking about education in Al-Azhar, he complained that students lack opportunities to talk to professors, ask questions or critically discuss the material. He also said that unlike Cairo and Ayn Shams Universities, al-Azhar did not teach its students research skills. When we talked about Central Asian-Arab and Central Asian-Turkish Islamic connections, he said that Turkish Islam was closer to the Islam of Central Asia as it was more 'modern' than Arab Islam and better applicable to the situation there. He criticized the tendency of Arabs to politicize religion. Even when they go to Central Asia, he said, they are more interested in exercising political influence than in the people themselves. He also thought that the Baythat-ul-Baptin Foundation, from which he receives his scholarship, could have done a better job in creating a network among the Muslim students it supports. 'If this foundation were run by Turks, they would have done it more effectively', he said. 'They are interested in each person.'

Nurcu students in Al-Azhar hold traditional gatherings (*suhbat*) where they discuss political, religious and social issues in the light of the teachings of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen. From my conversations with Kazakh students I understood that Nurcu take good care of their recruits. They move in to live with the Turkish Nurcus, which usually means living in better conditions than they otherwise could afford on their stipend. It seems that the Nurcu try to create an environment conducive for study and learning process, and Nurcu students usually do well in school and college. Reportedly, a couple of Kazakhs have even left Al-Azhar to study in Turkey.

⁵⁰ For more information about the Nurcu movement see Balci, 2003. Somewhere between 20-30 students from Kazakhstan identify with the Nurcu movement. According to accounts by non-Nurcu students, Turks are very selective in choosing Central Asian students and inviting them to live with them. Reportedly, they recruit the most bright and promising students; this is reminiscent of Turkish (Nurcu) schools' recruitment practices in Kazakhstan.

According to my findings, Central Asians appear more inclined to borrow from the Turkish culture and Turkish Islam, which can be partly explained by the cultural and linguistic affinities with the Turks and partly, perhaps, by a certain entanglement of Turkish Islam with secularism, which better suits secular conditions of Central Asia. On a socio-cultural level, I think, the affinity is evident in the rate of intermarriage between Kazakhs and Egyptians on the one hand and Turks on the other. It is very rare for a Kazakh student at Al-Azhar to marry an Egyptian, while on the other hand, on the one occasion when I attended a Nurcu women's *suhbat* in Almaty (the southern capital of Kazakhstan) all the women present had studied in Turkey and almost half of them were married to Turks.

Gendered Perspective: In Search of a Moral Order

During my fieldwork in al-Azhar I made friends with two young single Kazakh women, Roza (aged 31) and Gulnar (aged 29), who had been active practising Muslims for a long time and had studied Islam in one of the newly-opened Islamic universities, after which they had decided to come to Al-Azhar to learn Arabic and expand their knowledge of religion. They had been enrolled in *dirasa khasa* (preparatory school) for about a year. Their case was unusual as they did not have scholarships and were covering their own living expenses in Cairo. Their experience in Cairo was especially interesting for me as it had a gendered perspective.

The Kazakh 'diaspora' in al-Azhar had helped them to settle down in the area where most of the Kazakhs live. Because of their sensitive position as single females, they would ask male Kazakh male students to help them, for instance, to negotiate with the landlord, in order to impress upon the Egyptian community around that they were to be respected⁵¹. When I was conducting my fieldwork I also felt this kind of 'protective aura'. After I had conducted an

⁵¹ I might initially have gained a somewhat idealised view of the 'helping hand' of the Kazakh community at Al-Azhar. Apparently, relations between the community and single female Kazakh students are not always smooth. Gulnar once complained, for instance, that she was receiving some persistent marriage proposals. It seems that some of the Kazakh males help the females out of more than simple 'national' solidarity.

interview, for example, male Kazakh students would usually ask me if I felt comfortable taking a taxi alone, and even if I told them that I was completely comfortable about it they would take time to talk to a driver in Arabic and explain where I was going and even negotiate a good price for me. I think I would not get this kind of treatment from similar people if I were conducting interviews in Kazakhstan, so I assume there is a subtle understanding that gender relations amongst Kazakhs are different from gender relations in Egypt, and that Kazakh women need to be 'protected' from Egyptian men.

Gulnar and Roza are not the only single women from Central Asia in al-Azhar. There is another single girl from Kazakhstan who is now finishing the Kuliyyat. There are also several girls from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It may be that many women who are now married were single when they began to study: for instance, I talked to a recently married Tajik couple and found that the wife had been studying in the *thanawiyyah* at Al-Azhar on her own for two years before the marriage.

Roza and Gulnar told me that they were suffering from the excessive attention being paid to them and from overcrowding. For this reason, they did not like using public transport. Overall it seems that living and studying have been not easy for them, and they said that they were not going to persist through the college. They were thinking about staying one more year and then leaving after getting some *markaz's* certificate. When I first met Gulnar she was wearing the *naqab*, which seemed rather remarkable; in the secular environment of Kazakhstan even the *hijab* is very rarely worn, let alone the *naqab*. She said she started covering her face with the *naqab* after her arrival in Cairo, thinking it would make her feel more secure on the street and more decent. After a while, however, she stopped wearing it. When I asked why, she said that it felt unnatural, while another girl who were present said jokingly 'jihad has finished'.⁵²

⁵² Here we are talking about 'inner jihad,' as it is understood by believers, the inward spiritual struggle with one's self, the struggle to attain perfect faith, to be good and to do good.

I had many conversations with Gulnar and Roza on a wide range of issues including religion, society, relationships and marriage. Since we were all acquainted with both Egyptian and Kazakh society we were able to discuss them in 'comparative perspective'. On one occasion we were talking about the growing gap between rich and poor and the escalating crime rate in Kazakhstan. Roza said that the high crime rate was a manifestation of the breakdown of social order and morality and that justice and 'moral order' would be achieved when people become more religious (Islamic). Playing devil's advocate, I asked why there was so much poverty and inequality in Egypt when religion was so prominent in Egyptian society. She answered that from an Islamic point of view the wellbeing of society is not measured by wealth alone. Although Roza and Gulnar now lived in what could be called an Islamic community, it was of course far from the ideal of 'moral order'. From time to time problems would arise which caused Roza to question the intrinsic connection between the moral and the religious. When confronted with these problems Roza would 'rationalize' the situation, pointing out that it is written in the Quran that there are so many 'Munafiqun' among Muslims: people who look and act like Muslims but who are not true Muslims. My interviews with single women in Al-Azhar once again seem to prove Hans Mol's thesis on "affinity between identity-defense and sacralization" (Mol, 1976, p. 6). Women's turning to religion and finally coming to Al-Azhar can be best explained by their need to find some "order" or "maximize the order" in the face of the post-Soviet "chaos" (Mol, 1976, p. 8-14)

Renegotiating Identity

In my interviews with Azhari students I asked them what the term 'Islamic renaissance' meant as applied to Kazakhstan. Most of them said that the collapse of the Soviet Union had created a 'spiritual vacuum' which was being filled with Islam. At the same time, they also

disapprovingly noted that nowadays it was not only Islam which was filling the 'vacuum', but also a whole range of other religions and sects. In this regard, most of them felt that the government was not doing enough to stop the onslaught of foreign missionaries from the West⁵³. Some also expressed their religious concern in terms of 'conspiracy theory': that the whole country was being run by American and Jewish businesses⁵⁴, which were supposedly anti-Islamic by their very nature.

We also talked about the 'spiritual vacuum' and the 'crisis of morality' in Kazakhstan in my conversations with female students. On one occasion I pointed to a certain contradiction in the argument: if the vacuum is a problem created with the collapse of the Soviet Union, does this mean that under Soviet rule there was no vacuum, but real spirituality? Interestingly, the women agreed that there was more spirituality under Soviet rule than at the present time. Reza, for instance, said that 'then people believed in the future and the attitude of people to one another was different'.

To say the least, then, there is strong ambiguity among Azhari students, especially among the women, in their attitude towards the Soviet past and Russian influence. On the negative side, in Soviet times there were atheistic propaganda and atheistic education and reprisals against clergy and pious Muslims; nowadays it is the flow of morally questionable information and programmes⁵⁵ from Russia. Meanwhile many aspects of the Soviet period are now viewed positively: public services provided in the past by the Soviet state; the accessibility of quality education and medical care; and even the communist ideology of egalitarianism, which is

⁵³ Kazakhstan has a very liberal law on religious associations, adopted in 1992, which allows all religious associations which have been through a somewhat simple registration procedure to engage in missionary activity. Since then quite a competitive religious market has been created, and many so-called 'sects', such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Hare Krishnas, the Baha'i and the Ahmadiyyah, freely operating in Kazakhstan; this has caused considerable anxiety among nationalists and 'Islamists' about the potential conversion of Kazakhs to other religions.

⁵⁴ In this context I heard students talking about the largest holding in Kazakhstan, the 'Eurasian Group' run by Mashkevich, a Jew born in Kyrgyzstan, who is also head of the Jewish Eurasian Congress, a part of the World Jewish Congress.

⁵⁵ There is growing concern about 'scandalous' and 'morally degenerate' Russian talk shows such as 'Behind the Glasses' (Okna) and 'Laundry' (Stirka) in which celebrities or ordinary people discuss their private lives and 'issues' in public. These shows are aired during the evening prime time in Kazakhstan and attract huge audiences.

becoming valued in the light of growing stratification in Kazakhstan. It is notably that whenever women had any health-related problems they would prefer to go to the Russian hospital or turn to Russian-educated doctors for advice. Gulnar and Roza told me they went to the hospital at the Russian Embassy in Doqqi after they had tried the local hospital in Madinat Nasr and had been appalled by the conditions there. Reza would take her children to a Karachai student who had a medical degree from a Russian institution, even though he was no longer a practicing doctor.

Conclusion

The fact that Kazakh students are living away from their homeland helps to crystallize their individual quest for identity, which might be indicative of the same quest on a wider national level. The major drive here is to recover something authentically spiritual which had been lost with Russification and Sovietization. This is very much in line with Chatterjee's thesis on how the postcolonial world imagines its modernity by reinventing the distinctness of its spiritual culture, while acknowledging the West's superiority in the domain of material (Chatterjee, 1996, p.217). So, the students come to Al-Azhar to recover and reinforce their Muslimsness, which in a sense can be interpreted as strengthening their spiritual distinctness from the former colonizing "other." However, in Cairo, students find themselves in the midst of the new 'other'—Arabs. To position themselves vis-à-vis this new other they have to renegotiate their relation with the previous Russian 'other'. Thus the experiences of Kazakh students in Cairo reveal the character of the postcolonial situation and discourse within Kazakhstan itself. Kazakh students' coming to al-Azhar to study Islam is broadly an expression of their drive for ultimate de-colonization of consciousness from the remnants of Russianness, atheism and communism. However, their experience in al-Azhar slows down these negative sentiments to an extent that students find themselves to be able to give the communist colonial project a certain credit for spirituality⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ This positive assessment of some aspects of the socialist past by the students of Islam might also be a manifestation of certain ideological affinity between Communism and Islam, noted by many scholars (Maxime Rodinson as quoted in Rywkin 1990, p.

For Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, Kazakh identity is usually constructed vis-à-vis Russian identity; for Kazakhs in Cairo it becomes clear to what extent Russianness has been internalized and has in fact become an integral part of post-Soviet Kazakh and post-Soviet Muslim identity. Their translocal position helps students to come to terms with the hybridity, which is a result of their colonial past and a reality of their post-colonial situation.

87). Both Islam and Communism have a certain moral vision of society, the achievement of which requires restrictions on individual freedom. In this sense, both of them are anti-liberal.

CONCLUSION

In these concluding remarks, I would like to return to the questions posed in the introduction and briefly discuss them.

What has changed regarding the situation of Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Many things have changed. Islam is now functioning under a State, whose religious policies can be described as friendly to Islam, especially when compared with the policies of neighboring Uzbekistan and Russia, where a war on undefined "Islamic extremism and fundamentalism" is under way. The State has its own reasons for promoting Islam as a part of its national ideology and in this it is sowing a fertile ground, as all the Islamic activists and students of Islam I talked to are staunch patriots of the Kazakh state. Unlike many Islamic movements in other Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries, which have been positioning themselves in opposition to the secular state, Islamic forces within Kazakhstan are in alliance with the government against the liberal opposition which is seen as helping the imperialist West (the United States, in particular) to encroach on Kazakhstan's sovereignty.

At the same time, the State (or forces within the State) attempts not just to promote but to manipulate genuine interests of people in Islam by re-inventing certain forms of "traditional to the region" Islam such as Yassawiyya tariqa, the real historical prototype of which waned in the 17th and 18th century. However, these re-invented modes of Islam on the part of a nationalizing state cannot withstand the growing strength of standardized orthodox Sunni Islam, as both a global and a national religion, which is yet another example of how in today's world the global swamps the local. The State for its part has yet to learn how to deal with this new global Islam which cannot be completely controlled or co-opted by the State.

Despite re-Islamicization taking place in Kazakhstan, many things have not changed since the late Soviet period, and some have changed in ways contra-indicated by Islamicization and undesirable from an Islamic point of view. Kazakhstan remains a pronouncedly secular country where religion is not a central factor in social life. There is no religious instruction in public schools, and displays of religiosity in public space might or might not be tolerated, depending on the situation. In addition to the surviving Soviet anti-Islamic and anti-religious practices and attitudes, the advance of capitalism has brought many new social ills, which were contained or non-existent in Soviet times, but are now unleashed and uncontrolled: poverty, prostitution, drugs, sexual promiscuity as a lifestyle and an economic strategy, new morally questionable modes of consumption, etc. Islamic forces in Kazakhstan condemn all these social ills but cannot contain them as the Soviets did.

What is the specificity of the Post-Soviet Islamic identity and how does it interact with the other set of social identifications?

Farideh Heyat, student of Islam in Kyrgyzstan from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, once noted that "Soviet Muslims have religious hearts and atheistic minds" (Heyat 275). This phrase reflects a complexity of the post-Soviet situation with Islam. For the generation of people who saw the collapse and disgrace of Communist values, betrayed by the Communist party leaders, it is very difficult again to believe in and follow authority. Thus, people believe in God, as perhaps they did in the Soviet times, but they have very critical and sometimes cynical attitudes towards the state and religious authorities. The state might have its own purpose in promoting Islam, but people learn about Islam and follow Islamic practices for their own reasons. There are no social or family pressures to be religious, and nobody today much cares about what the State wants. So, if somebody is becoming religious, it is through his or her own free will and free choice. The question of "why" still remains to be answered, though. In this work, I put forward an argument grounded in Hans Mol's theory on

"sacralization of identity" (Mol 70-71), according to which people turn to Islam because they need a "reliable reference" system in the face of social chaos, "predatory capitalism," and the disintegration of other components/layers of their identities in the ideological void which followed the collapse of the Soviet system. In post-Soviet Central Asia, strangely enough, discredited Soviet ideology's emphasis on equality, communitarianism, international friendship, and struggle with imperialism finds continuity in the rise of Islamic identification.

In the light of Renato Ortiz's theory, which states that universal religions today allow people in the Third World to feel globalization and practice globalization on their own terms (Ortiz 430-433), I also argue that Islam with its universal qualities and universal applications complements for the particularistic deficiency of the nationalist ideology in Kazakhstan. During my research I observed that people who turn to Islam also tend to be "people of the soil," patriots and nationalists. Michael Rywkin once noted about Central Asian Communists that being a Communist in their view didn't contradict being a Muslim (Rywkin 140). If that was the situation under Soviets, then today being nationalist and Islamist simultaneously is a natural state for many. So, my final thesis is that Islamic revival and formation of Kazakh national identity in Kazakhstan are two complementary processes. Islam is a focus in the quest for Kazak identity and, at the same time, a larger social imaginary which allows people to escape the narrowness and easily discernable contradictions of state imposed national identification. In turning to Islam people remain patriotic and nationalist in their own way -- the way, which, perhaps, offers them more powerful and stable identity anchorage in the increasingly globalized world.

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